
Russian Life
MAY JUNE 2010
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A visit to Sevastopol
Moscow Metro
Terror returns
The Meshketians
Unwilling migrants
Hero of Two Armies
World War II soldier
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From Russian Life BOOKS

The Little Golden Calf

ilya ilf & evgeny petrov



This new edition of *The Little Golden Calf*, one of the greatest Russian satires, is the first English translation of this classic novel in nearly 50 years. It is also the first unabridged, uncensored English translation ever, and includes an introduction by Alexandra Ilf, daughter of one of the book's two co-authors.

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— *New York Times* (1932)

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"Bravo for Anne O. Fisher for her wonderful annotated translation of Ilf's and Petrov's hilarious road novel... Russian Life BOOKS has done a very nice job of producing the volume, which will prove enormously useful in classes in Russian History and Literature."

— Professor Jeffrey Brooks, The Johns Hopkins University

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by paul e. richardson

Nations Without Borders

We like to think that borders are neat, rational things, that they tidily separate one nation from another, prudently tracing the line of an ancient river or the frontiers of tribal hunting grounds.

But borders are the furthest thing from rational, they are certainly not neat, and they are notoriously awful at separating one nation or people from another. Borders are merely the geographic counterpart to the hour markings on a clockface: human inventions that help us define our world, deceiving ourselves with a semblance of order. Even the stone border walls of China, Berlin and now Jerusalem are just temporary affects that flout an ever-changing reality.

The borders of Muscovy, Rus', Russia and the Soviet Union have never been firmly set. Their undulations and contractions in the 1990s were merely the most recent fluctuation in a millenium of changes. How this reality has affected the lives of Russians, Ukrainians, Turks, Georgians, Uzbeks and even Americans is a major theme running through all of the features in this issue.

In two of those features, we visit a pair of very Russian cities – Vitebsk and Sevastopol. Neither are within the borders of present-day Russia, yet both are very "Russian" and have had huge impacts on the course of Russian history. In a third feature, we learn of the plight of the Meskhetian Turks. Exiled in 1944 from Soviet Georgia (where they were already semi-exiles from Turkey), they are still unable to return home. Many have now arrived on America's shores.

In the remaining two features, we learn of the challenges of breaching linguistic borders (how one tries to make a German, speaking English, sound like a Russian), and hear the story of a remarkable American who fought in both the American and Soviet armies during World War II. This American returned home to raise a son who would become the U.S. Ambassador to Russia.

This brings us around to the second theme that runs through all the stories in this issue: the Second World War in Europe, which drew to a close 65 years ago this May. Vitebsk and Sevastopol were both decimated and occupied by Nazi Germany during the war, the Meskhetians have the war (and of course Stalin) to thank for their exile, and the two remaining features are even more explicitly tied to the war, cinematically or otherwise.

It is of course not surprising that these two themes should wind through all our stories. Wars are most often fought over borders, physical or otherwise. And those who live at the intersections of nation states tend to suffer in greater measure than the rest of us. Certainly more than those safely cosseted in government bureaus, methodically erecting economic, social and political borders against the outside world.

Enjoy the issue.

Russian Life

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To the Editors:

As a subscriber to Russian Life, I am always pleased with having the opportunity to learn more about Russian culture and history. Having said that, I was quite troubled by Alina Lisina's article (March/April, 2010) about Russian Riga.

As someone who studies and conducts field research in the Baltic States, including Riga, the use of the phrase "After Latvian independence in 1991," is at best factually incorrect, and at worst, inflammatory (i.e. 1991 represented a return to Latvian independence). This in conjunction with terms such as "briefly an independent nation," also negatively connotes Latvian's status as a distinct nation of the world. Furthermore, without supporting or condemning the language laws, I would suggest Estonia has also followed a similar path to Latvia in regards to their official language policies (and I would suggest the implication that "in other former Soviet republics, longtime residents automatically received citizenship" is misleading – particularly for ethnic Russian military members living in these countries at the time of re-independence).

Best Regards,
Brent McKenzie

To the Editors:

In response to Maria Antonova's Notebook story, "Slowing Abortions: Zhirinovsky proposes payouts." Although Vladimir Zhirinovsky's idea of offering monetary incentives to deter young women from getting abortions may not be a bad one, R100,000 is hardly enough to help with raising a child. The USDA estimates that in the U.S. it costs about $13,000 per year to raise a child – about R380,000. Even if it were half that cost in Russia, Zhirinovsky's proposal would not pay for one year of the child's life. In order for this incentive to really work, the government, in my opinion, would have to be willing and able to give out much more money or perhaps some sort of tax incentives for those mothers.

Nicole Riedesel
College Station, TX

To the Editors:

The Notebook section from March/April 2010 issue states that in Russia in 2009 "production of caviar *increased* by 22%." I think

continued, page 63

Letters may be edited for grammar, spelling and to fit the space available. The best way to write us is by email. See the editorial box on the preceding page for our email address.

Places mentioned in this issue



SYZRAN Founded in 1683, this town of 160,000 in Samara oblast stands on the right bank of the Volga and was long an important transport center that was well fortified. In 1880, 18 kilometers north of the city, the Syzransky (Alexandrovsky) bridge was built across the Volga, at the time the longest bridge in Europe.



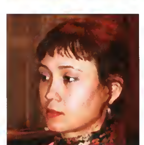
Nicky Gardner (Vitebsk, page 41) is a writer based in Berlin, Germany. She has a particular interest in social and cultural minorities in Europe. Over the last five years, Nicky has authored over 400 articles for print publications, many of them exploring aspects of everyday life in unsung parts of Europe. Her work is, she says, an exercise in literary cartography, quietly uncovering aspects of European life glossed over by the regular media. Nicky works with a Berlin-based editorial bureau that provides text, images and creative advice for the media, governments and the private sector. She is also co-editor of *hidden europe* magazine (**hiddeneurope.co.uk**). She wrote on Russian Berlin for the Jan/Feb 2010 issue of Russian Life.



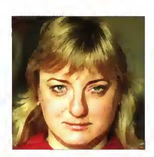
Dmitry Shevchenko (Meskhetian Turks, page 52) graduated from Kuban State University with a psychology degree and has been a journalist since 2004. His articles have appeared in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Izvestiya, Kommersant,* and *Novaya Gazeta*, among others. His primary topics of interest are human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development. He recently wrote a series of articles investigating the social causes and effects of poaching in the Azov sea. He lives in Krasnodar. This is his first article for Russian Life.



Stephen Dewar (The Dialog Coach, page 50) was born in Ireland but has lived and worked in Russia, mostly as an economic and development adviser, since early 1996. In between assignments he has worked as a business news reporter at *Russia Today* television, acted in movies, been a journalist, taught at Russian universities and worked with the Russian Ministry of Education. In Ireland he was an academic, farmer, small businessman, public servant and editor/journalist. He was also, briefly, the head of an African safari company. He has edited, written and contributed to a number of academic books and monographs on Russian and EU-Russian affairs. His wife is Russian.



Karina Klimenko (Sevastopol, page 28) was born in Chelyabinsk, a city in the Ural Mountains, but always feels more at home outside the industrial landscape. She says she writes to "investigate" what inspires people, be it singing, sailing, building ships or climbing mountains. She has a degree in Regional European Studies and studied journalism in Germany. She contributes as a freelance journalist to a number of publications and specializes in cultural anthropology, traditional culture and its impact on modern life. She wrote on Tuvan throat singing for the Sep/Oct 2009 issue of Russian Life.



Irina Titova (Hero of Two Armies, page 38) was born and raised in Pskov and studied at the Pskov State Pedagogical Institute, St. Petersburg State University, and at St. Michael's College, in Burlington, Vermont. Titova has worked as a news and feature reporter for *The St. Petersburg Times* and as a stringer in St. Petersburg for The Associated Press. In our Mar/Apr 2008 issue, Irina contributed an article on the history of St. Petersburg's Russian Museum.

ON THIS DATE: May 15 is Krasnaya Gorka, a pre-Christian holiday welcoming spring and still a popular day for weddings. With the Christianization of Rus, it often came to be celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter, or on Yuriev's Day.

Blaming the Messenger

Once again, press blamed for terrorism

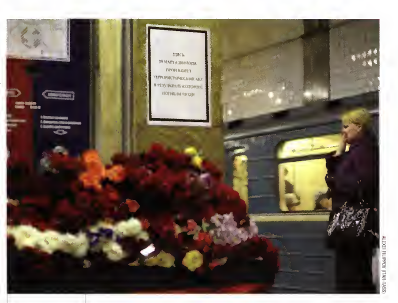
IN THE AFTERMATH of March's suicide bombings in the Moscow metro, Kremlin-faithful politicians seem to have decided that the best defense is to go on the attack. Instead of questioning why security forces failed to prevent the explosions, leading to the murder of dozens of innocent people, many politicians reacted by blaming dissenting voices, journalists, and even YouTube.

The United Russia party once again took top honors for the most extreme remarks. "Attempts to 'shake up' the political situation, the exacerbation of negative trends in society, is what, in the end, leads to such tragic events," said United Russia deputy Irina Yarovaya. "With their actions, the terrorists have shown the value of these negative forces permeating our country's political space."

Boris Yakemenko, a leader of the pro-Kremlin Nashi movement, all but equated the "opposition" (which he said includes everything from drug addicts to 'protectors of human rights' to fascists, and which "greets Russia's every stumble with vengeful glee") with the terrorists. "If it's not the terrorist underground," Yakemenko wrote on his blog, "then it's these organizers of protests, anti-police campaigns and other 'oppositionists' who can take credit for the 20+ innocent victims. It's their first success."

Meanwhile, some of Russia's most respected publications argued that society got the short end of the stick when freedoms were exchanged for increased security (e.g. with President Vladimir Putin's decision after the Beslan massacre to appoint governors instead of holding regional elections), since the security services are not delivering on their part of the bargain. Security analyst Alexei Soldatov wrote that the security services have focused on siege operations rather than intelligence gathering, which shows that the government is not willing to bargain with the terrorists, yet little has been accomplished to prevent attacks.

The ruling party did not take the criticism constructively. United Russia leader Boris Gryzlov stated that the newspapers *Vedomosti* and *Moskovsky Komsomolets* and the terrorists "are all part of the same circle. One suspects that these publications and the actions of the terrorists are connected." A Just Russia party leader Sergei Mironov chimed in that "Some publications have played into the terrorists' hands by convincing our citizens that our security services are ineffective."



ALEXEI FILIPPOV (ITAR-TASS)

March 30 at the Park Kultury Moscow Metro Station, the day after the terrorist bomb blasts. Since the blasts, leading politicians have been pointing fingers at the media.

As if that were not enough, United Russia deputy Robert Schlegel proposed amending legislation regulating the media in order to punish publications that report terrorists' demands or speeches. "News about fighters (*boyeviki*) should only report on their elimination," Schlegel said. He also lashed out at YouTube and Google for allowing terror boss Doku Umarov to upload a video in which he claimed responsibility for the attacks and promised more to come. "If Google doesn't support the terrorists, they should take the video down," Schlegel said.

Schlegel is known for introducing new laws to limit press freedoms by way of testing the political waters. And while it is not clear how far Schlegel is willing to go, it is not the first time the press has been blamed when things got out of control. Previous amendments limiting journalists' coverage of terrorism were passed after NTV's particularly pervasive coverage of the Nord-Ost hostage crisis.

RIP Obmen Valyuty

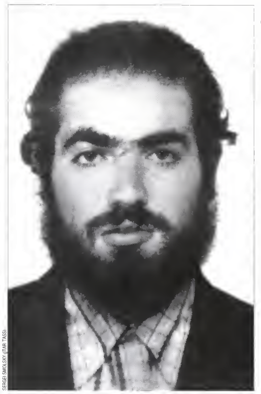
One of the symbols of the 1990s, the currency exchange booth, will soon disappear. The Russian Central Bank is forcing banks to either close exchange points (often carved out of a dark apartment building entryway) or turn them into full-fledged branch offices. There are reportedly 709 currency exchanges in Russia, the vast majority of which are in Moscow and the Moscow region. They were especially popular in the 1990s, when the unstable exchange rate prompted Russians to convert their ruble savings into dollars in order to save them from devaluation. However, the exchanges are hard to monitor and often offer deceptive exchange rates and charge usurious transaction commissions, the Central Bank said. The decree will go into effect October 1.

Press Tycoon

Russia's maverick oligarch Alexander Lebedev has bought a second British newspaper, the *Independent*, after revamping the *Evening Standard* tabloid, which he purchased last year. Lebedev paid one British pound to take over the publication, which is deeply in debt. Lebedev also owns Russia's liberal, oppositionist newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta*, in partnership with Mikhail Gorbachev. Although Lebedev said he wants the *Independent* to become profitable, he told the *Wall Street Journal* he is "not in the business for the money." The *Evening Standard* was rebranded as a free publication last year, following its purchase by Lebedev's company, *Evening Press*.

Thriller Lauded

How I Ended this Summer, a new film by Russian director Alexei Popogrebsky, received two Berlin Bear awards at the Berlin Film Festival. Popogrebsky's previous films were *Koktebel* and *Prostye Veshchi* (*Simple Things*), both well-received by critics but poor box office performers. *How I Ended this Summer* has just two actors, Sergei Puskepalis and Grigory Dobrygin, who shared the Berlin Festival's Best Actor award. The film's second award was for Pavel Kostomarov's camera work capturing Chukotka's rugged wilderness. The film's plot revolves around two characters working at a meteorological station on an island in the Arctic Ocean. The film opened in Russian theaters on April 1. (**etimletom.ru**)



SERGEI SMOLSKY (ITAR TASS)

Reclusive math genius Grigory Perelman

Price of Solitude

Math genius hides from money and limelight

Grigory Perelman, the brilliant mathematician who solved the Poincaré Conjecture (see Russian Life Nov/Dec 2006), has received the Millennium Prize Problems Award, which pays out one million dollars. But Perelman has indicated he may refuse the money.

It is a repeat of the situation with the prestigious Fields Medal, which Perelman was entitled to receive in 2006, but has declined. Instead, Perelman has opted to stay out of the spotlight. As described in Masha Gessen's book, *Perfect Rigor*, Perelman abandoned mathematics after becoming disillusioned with the field's slow recognition of his genius and its "unethical practices" (as he told *The New Yorker* some years ago). He is unemployed and lives with his mother on the outskirts of St. Petersburg.

At a loss for up-to-date photographs of the reclusive genius. news agencies have resorted to snapping blurry outlines of his head in his apartment window, or attempting to talk to him through his closed apartment door. James Carlson, current head of the Clay Mathematics Institute, the foundation that initiated the Millennium Prize, told the Associated Press that the award is Perelman's whether or not he accepts the money, but could not say where the money would go if Perelman refused to take it.

Closer Regions

Extending the power vertical through time

The first fruits of President Dmitry Medvedev's initiative to slash the number of Russia's time zones were felt when daylight savings time changed in March.

Samara region and Udmurtia have changed their time zone by one hour to coincide with Moscow time. Kemerovo region, Kamchatka, and Chukotka have all moved one hour closer to Moscow as well, which means that the number of 10▶

"Where are my two Volgas? Where are yours? Why do we have such a rift between the rich and the poor? Where did the billionaires come from? Did they earn their wealth?"

Former Central Bank head and Yukos CEO Viktor Gerashchenko, on why liberal economic reforms of the 1990s were "naïve." (**slon.ru**)



"Contention within the ruling tandem is impossible, and it will be in the country's driver's seat beyond 2012."

Head of the A Just Russia party, Sergei Mironov (**gazeta.ru**)



"Not a single police officer knows who the organizers are. They snatch up random participants at rallies, and in court no one can say anything. And this circus has been going on for several years. There are cases of people being detained who have nothing to do with the protests, including journalists."

Olga Yegorova, Chairwoman of the Moscow City Court (Interfax), on detention of demonstrators

"I would refer Ms. Yegorova to the authorities. Let her request of the Moscow government that all rallies be permitted, as it is our constitutional right to hold them. As far as the police, I don't have many complaints... It is my impression that it is the courts who refuse to rule on illegal, in my opinion, detainments. They don't want to rule on them and send the cases back to the police."

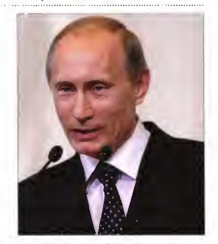
Writer and politician Eduard Limonov (Interfax)

"As to Medvedev, his evaluation of recent events, in my opinion, more accurately reflects what has happened, than Putin's."

Communist party head Gennady Zyuganov (*Vedomosti*)

"There is also the position taken by Kisa Vorobyaninov, who said that there are issues where haggling is not appropriate. In general, I agree with Kisa."

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin quoting a character* from Ilf and Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs*, regarding Belarus' silence on recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, (RIA Novosti).



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ITAR TASS; ITAR TASS; ANDREI LUKIN (ITAR TASS); MAXIM SHEMETOV (ITAR TASS); YURI MASHKOV (ITAR TASS)

* **OOPS.** One has to be careful with literary references. In the novel, Kisa Vorobyaninov is a front man who tricks Kislyarsky out of 500 rubles, sending the poor fellow packing instead of leaving him to continue his nice vacation. Thus, Putin unwittingly endorsed a lying swindler's trickery. (See Survival Russian, page 27)

SPRING HAS SPRUNG After one of Russia's severest winters in recent years, this spring has been especially wet. Right: Flooding of the Ilovlya river, Volgograd Oblast, at the end of March. Below: A run on rubber boots at the factory store of Red Triangle, St. Petersburg.



DMITRY ROGULIN (ITAR TASS)



VADIM ZHERNOV (ITAR TASS)

Closer to the People

A new website has been created to syndicate all blogs by Russian government officials and politicians. Goslyudi.ru, launched by the Polit.Ru website, monitors blogs that officials began after President Dmitry Medvedev's campaigned to get old-school bureaucrats using the internet. Although many officials have their press services maintain their blogs, there are personal ones, notably by Perm governor Oleg Chirkunov, Kirov governor Nikita Belykh, and A Just Russia party head Sergei Mironov.

Brighton Idols

The popularity of the reality TV show *Jersey Shore* has producers looking to create a similar reality show about young Russian Americans based in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn's Russian speaking neighborhood. The producers are reportedly scouting for promising "Russian Snookis" to be cast in *Brighton Beach*, which has attracted over 4,000 potential fans and participants on Facebook. The main difference from *Jersey Shore*, producers Alina Dizik and Elina Miller told *The New Yorker*, is that *Brighton Beach*'s players will speak "russlish" and "create a microcosm of the Soviet Union in the house." (**brightonbeachshow.com**)

Russian time zones has now been reduced from eleven to nine.

There may be further merging of time zones in Siberia and the Urals, presidential aide Arkady Dvorkovich told Itar-Tass, but the issue requires more research. Medvedev has also suggested dropping daylight savings time, introduced in the Soviet Union in 1981, and mainly only implemented in the Northern Hemisphere.

Medvedev championed the time zone overhaul in his State of the Union address. "Have you ever considered how having so many divisions can make difficult the effective ruling of the country?" he asked.

Hundreds of people in Samara protested the region's temporal subordination to Moscow, demanding a referendum on the subject, although authorities refused to sanction their rally. "United Russia stole an hour

from our day!" read protest banners.

Meanwhile, some analysts suggested that Medvedev's persistence on such a trivial issue, when Russia is dealing with a wide array of serious socioeconomic problems and a budget deficit, demonstrates his political impotence. "This is something where he can act totally independent from Putin," the Carnegie Center's Nikolai Petrov told *The Moscow Times*. "But it is a niche pretty much at the fringes of politics."

Dictator's Shadow

Stalin's figure used for political capital

More than half a century after his death, Stalin has once again become a subject of debate in the lead up to the 65th anniversary of Victory Day (May 9). Moscow authorities, notably Mayor Yury Luzhkov, proposed hanging portraits of Stalin in the Russian capital to commemorate his leadership during World War II.

"I am not a Stalinist, but I favor objectivity in recounting history," Luzhkov said. "It was Stalin who led the country to victory and this is a fact that cannot be silenced."

Immediately, the human rights organization Memorial retaliated by announcing that they will install posters informing Muscovites about Stalin's repressions, some of which (notably the evisceration of the officer corps on the eve of the war) likely put Russia at greater risk of defeat. Said Russian Culture Minister Alexander Avdeyev, Stalin was "a hangman" who "bears full responsibility for the array of defeats our country faced in the first two years of the war."

A public debate ensued, with regional authorities carefully monitoring the wind direction. In the end, both Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev failed to applaud Luzhkov's initiative. While Medvedev called Stalin's repressions a crime, Putin said more ambiguously that the situation "cannot be judged in general." The city backed away from their plans to decorate the city with the posters. For now.

According polls by **levada.ru**, 32 percent of Russians have a positive view of Stalin (versus 38 percent in 2001), 38 percent are indifferent toward him (12 percent in 2001), and 24 percent have negative views (43 percent in 2001).

"Stalin's image is interesting to Russia's current rulers because it's connected to the most powerful symbol of unity – the memory of victory in World War II," Alexei Levinson, a sociologist at Levada Center told **polit.ru**, "and his crimes make him not a weaker, but a stronger symbol" that can be used to cement the legitimacy of an authoritarian regime.

Back to Shkola

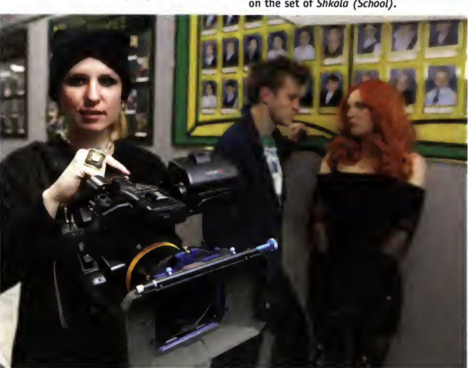
Show an affront to school workers

A controversial TV series about a Moscow high school may be prompting overdue discussions about school reform. The series, called simply *Shkola* ("School") is the creation of Valeria Gay-Germanika, who directed *Everybody Dies*

"Today a person does not have to resort to baseness when his conscience comes in conflict with the interests of authorities. Unlike 30 years ago, he will not be locked up in a mental asylum; unlike 60 years ago, he won't be shot... The opportunity to not have to choose between being a scoundrel or a hero is a great breakthrough for a country like ours. There are very few people who would risk their careers to preserve their self respect... And self-respect (not to be confused with self-love) is our scarcest national quality. Everyone today has the freedom to respect or to not respect themselves. And it is from that freedom that all other freedoms spring."

Writer Boris Akunin on why he feels Russia is a free country (Russian *Newsweek*)

Director Valeria Gay-Germanika and actors on the set of *Shkola (School)*.



ANTON BELITSKY (ITAR-TASS)

Movie still from *Burnt by the Sun: Menace* (left, Nikita Mikhalkov; right, Dmitry Dyuzhev.



ITAR-TASS

Chasing Vampires
Timur Bekmambetov, Russia's leading action film director (*Night Watch, Day Watch, Wanted, The Last Witch Hunter*) is teaming up with Tim Burton to produce a film based on the best selling book *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, according to *ScreenDaily*.

Runglish
It's official. For years, Russophiles have debated what to call the strange admixture of Russian and English spoken by persons who straddle the Russian-English linguistic divide by inserting Russian words into English conversation ("I have got to get these guys to finish my remont") or Russianizing English words, as in *poslaysany chiz* ("sliced cheese"). Most have called it "russlish," and others "runglish," yet Merriam-Webster recently adopted "**rusglish** (noun): a combination of Russian and English." The word was submitted by Yury Stoma of Penza, who also successfully submitted this to the linguistic authority: "**rumorology** (noun): the study or practice of spreading rumors."

From State to Church
The government is finalizing a draft bill that will give ownership of all religious structures nationalized by the Bolsheviks back to the Orthodox Church, with the exclusion of just a few UNESCO World Heritage sites, such as the Kremlin. The law, once passed, will make the Russian Orthodox Church the largest landowner in Russia, after the Russian government. Critics have said the decision is dictated by the government's desire for loyalty and support from the Church, and that the change in ownership could displace hundreds of museums and put works of art in jeopardy.

Fall Guys
Russia's underwhelming performance in the Vancouver Olympics disappointed even the worst pessimists and has now stepped up the pressure for Sochi. President Medvedev lashed out against inept "fat cats" - Russia's sports bureaucrats - and urged them to step down. Eight, including the head of Russia's Olympic Committee, Leonid Tyagachev (who also happens to be Prime Minister Putin's ski instructor), took the hint. Sports minister Vitaly Mutko has so far managed to keep his post.

But Me, a film which got a special mention at the 2008 Cannes Festival.

The low-budget series (complete with jerky filming) portrays the daily lives of 14-16 year olds in a Moscow school, and it pulls no punches when it comes to drinking, sex, cursing and violence. The series originally aired in prime time on Channel One, but, after a public uproar, was moved to a less conspicuous 11:30 PM time slot.

While many critics have called *Shkola* an outrage and a disgrace, others have applauded its frank display of what can go on in the school system. While Gay-Germanika has publicly said she isn't trying to send a political message, her show may help launch school reforms, something President Medvedev has indicated an interest in. Channel One, a longtime Kremlin mouthpiece, officially stated that "hypocritical statements that education has no problems are unconstructive for the country."

Burnt by the Net

Movie patriarch ridiculed into humility

Director Nikita Mikhalkov is releasing his long-anticipated sequel to *Burnt by the Sun*, the 1994 Academy Award winning film about a decorated Red Army colonel at the dawn of Stalin's Great Purge.

Although Colonel Kotov was said to be shot at the end of *Burnt by the Sun*, the sequel returns him from the dead (not unlike Ostap Bender, murdered at the end of *The Twelve Chairs*, then miraculously alive again in *The Little Golden Calf*) and inserts him in a "disciplinary battalion" during World War II. Moreover, the sequel is actually divided into two full-length films, *Burnt by the Sun: Menace*, about the horrors of the first year of the war, and *Burnt by the Sun: Citadel*, which has a more optimistic tone. A 12-part TV miniseries version will also be aired.

The movie was released just before Victory Day, and its publicity

struck a decidedly dissonant chord with the public. "A great film about a great war," say the film's posters, displaying an audacious lack of modesty while capitalizing on an important and painful subject. Bloggers immediately began to mock the director, Photoshop-ing the promotional images and changing the title to "L'homme Nikita" or "A Great Film About Me, Again."

Monstrations

Police just don't get the joke

Authorities have cracked down on Artyom Loskutov, a Novosibirsk resident and artist who has organized annual "Monstrations" – massive rallies sporting absurd slogans and lacking any overt political message.

Since 2004, Loskutov has inspired increasing numbers of young people to join in annual May Day celebrations "with no goals except aesthetic ones, in order to, 'show oneself and look at people' as the Russian proverb says."

Evidently, however, even banal slogans such as "Where am I?", "Foot is a man's best friend," and "ZhPChShTs" make authorities suspicious. Loskutov was arrested last year by Novosibirsk police on charges of marijuana possession. On his blog (**kissmybabushka.com**), Loskutov said the drugs were planted. Novosibirsk authorities have repeated denied requests to hold a Monstration in the city in 2010.

Though the R20,000 fine Loskutov would face if convicted is not that large, the use of drug charges against non-political activists may be unprecedented, *Kommersant* noted. Only members of the outlawed National Bolshevik party and labor unionists have previously suffered a similar fate.



NIKITA KHNYUNIN AND MAYA SHYOLKOVNIKOVA

A March 31 action in Novosibirsk organized by artist Artyom Loskutov (with megafon, inset). Participants held signs with the number "42," because that is the value of 2010 minus the fateful year 1968. Meanwhile, police officers record the sedate events, so as to fill out Loskutov's dossier.

Russia: A Journey of Peace

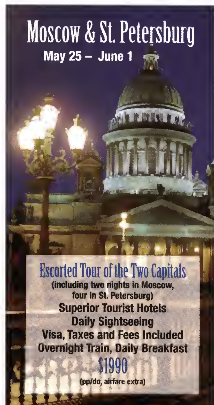


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ANDREI STAROSTIN (ITAR-TASS)

Paralympic multi-medalist Ivek Zaripov and his son Ainur at home in Sterlitamak.

Paras Win Big

Russia's Paralympic athletes brought home the top number of medals of any nation: 38 medals (12 gold, 16 silver and 10 bronze). Germany came in second with 23 total medals (13 of which were gold).

This performance was in sharp contrast to the Russian Olympic squad, which placed 11th in medals at Vancouver and won just three golds, for its worst result since 1912.

Irek Zaripov was the Russian hero of the Paralympic games with five medals – four gold and one silver (in ski races and seated-biathlon). Zaripov, who competes from a wheelchair, said he felt he and his coach had done a good job preparing for the Games and that he "was really overwhelmed."

President Dmitry Medvedev (who lashed out at Russian sports officials after Vancouver, forcing Russian Olympic Committee President Leonid Tyagachev to step down) signed a decree whereby all Russia's Paralympians received state awards. Medvedev said that "they displayed a great spirit and strong will to victory."

It was also decided that the Paralympic medalists would receive monetary prizes on parity with Olympic athletes (€100,000 for gold medals, €60,000 for silver, €40,000 for bronze) as well as comparable gifts – like the Audis received by Olympians.

Plushenko's Gold

Yakutsk jewelers said they plan to award Olympic figure skating silver medalist Evgeni Plushenko a special "belated gold medal" weighing more than half a kilo.

Plushenko, who won the men's silver medal amid controversy at Vancouver (American Evan Lysacek took the gold, but did not perform a quadruple jump, as did Plushenko), received the sympathy of most Russians, including Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who sent Plushenko a telegram, saying: "Your silver is worth gold."

Plushenko claimed he was a victim of biased judging in Vancouver and felt he, not Lysacek, was the "true" champion, because he performed a quadruple spin jump, while Lysacek did not. Three-time Olympic pairs champion Irina Rodnina broke ranks with public opinion and said Plushenko lost the gold because he put too much emphasis on technical complexity, and that his step sequence was inferior to that of Lysacek.

Japanese Ringer

CSKA* Moscow defeated Seville to qualify for the UEFA Champions League quarterfinals for the first time ever with a 2-1 away win. CSKA's 23-year-old midfielder Keisuke Honda (a native of Japan) scored a decisive free-kick goal to clinch the win.

Insult to Injury

Russia's figure skaters did even worse at the World Championships in Torino (Italy) in March than the did in Vancouver. Yuko Kawaguti and Alexander Smirnov won Russia's only medal – a bronze in pairs.

In men's singles, in the absence of Evgeni Plushenko, who was sidelined with an injury, Sergei Voronov placed highest, at 14th. In women's singles Alyona Leonova came in 13th, and in ice dancing Yekaterina Bobrova and Dmitry Soloviev topped out at 8th. Olympic bronze medalists Maxim Shabalin and Oksana Domnina were absent.

* CSKA = Центральный Спортивный Клуб Армии (Central Sport Club of the Army)

Facts & Figures

Russians comprised **6%** of the world's total of 377,000 asylum seekers in 2009. This puts Russia in fourth place after Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia, and followed by China and Serbia. **13,630** persons requested political asylum in Russia over the past 5 years. The United States was the destination country with the most applications: 49,000, followed by France with 42,000.

An average car on Russian roads is **12.9** years old, which is .9 years older than the average age one year ago. The oldest cars are in Sakhalin (**19.1** years old) and Kaliningrad (19) regions. The youngest are in Tatarstan (9.1 years old) and Perm region (9.3 years old). **23%** of cars in Russia are over 20 years old.

The average bribe in Russia has increased by **250%** over 2009, jumping from R9,000 to **R23,000**. Last year some 4,000 persons were detained for involvement in corrupt transactions.

Russians are happiest in Tyumen region: **81%** percent of Tyumen residents said they are mostly happy with their lives. Moscow is the second happiest region with **80%**, Tatarstan is third with **78%**.

46.5% of Russian men and **51.7%** of Russian women are overweight. In 2000, the figure was **30.7%** for men and **27.4%** for women.

56% of Russian men think women and men have equal opportunities in Russia. **49%** of Russian women think so.

40% of Russian men think women have harder lives than men in Russia. **63%** of women think so (down from 56% and 73%, respectively, in 2001).

65 Years Ago:

The War on the Eastern Front

95% of the European Axis forces (Germany, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Finland, Romania, etc.) that were killed in World War II were killed on the Russian Front. Total German military losses in the East were more than **4,000,000** killed, including 1.1 million by March 1942 (still two years before the Allies opened a Second Front in Europe, in June of 1944).



Kerch, 1942

DMITRY BALTERMANTS (REPRODUCED BY ITAR-TASS)

In August 1942, the Germans approached Stalingrad with **1,250,000** men. Of this number only **30,000** ever returned home. On November 19, 1942, the Russians encircled 330,000 German troops inside Stalingrad. Of this number, 94,000 survived and surrendered on January 31, 1943. Only 5,000 ever returned home.

The Battle of Kursk took place in July of 1943 and involved **2,500,000** Red Army and **1,000,000** German troops. In this two-week battle, nearly half of all German troops were killed (125,000), or captured or wounded (350,000).

On June 22, 1944, the Soviet Union launched "Operation Bagration" against German Army Group Center. In the week that followed, German battle casualties were **480,000** men. Army Group Center lost 25 of its 43 divisions. In five weeks, the Russian Army moved 200 miles west to the gates of Warsaw. On the Second Front in France, during the six weeks after D-Day (June/July 1944) total German losses were **140,000** men.

During the course of the Battle of Berlin, Germany lost **460,000** soldiers and another 480,000 were captured. By 1945, the Russians had amassed **30** times more artillery than the Germans, virtually all of which was produced by the Soviets themselves (**97%** of the weapons Soviets used during the war were Soviet made, including 100% of their own artillery, 99% of their tanks, 93% of their own aircraft and 82% of their trucks).

An estimated **34 million** Soviets "donned a military uniform" during WWII. Over 8.6 million Soviet troops were killed and over **4.5 million** were taken prisoner by the Germans. The Soviet Union also suffered an estimated **12-14 million** civilian casualties.

SOURCES: 65 Years Ago: Walter DuBlanica, except for last paragraph: *Ivan's War*, by Catherine Merridale, and other sources. FACTS & FIGURES: 1. UNHCR.org 2. Autostat.ru 3. Department of Economic Security of the Interior Ministry 4. Rosgosstrakh Insurance Company, via RIA Novosti 5. World Health Organization, via *Vedomosti*.


Bogoyavlensky Cathedral, built in 1624, was restored to service in 1992. Part of the larger Zaikonospassky Monastery, it is located just a stone's throw from Red Square.

Central Location

Zaikonospassky Monastery, an ancient structure only 100 meters from Red Square, will once again become an active monastery, the Orthodox Church's Holy Synod has decided.

Founded by Boris Godunov in 1600, the monastery also housed Russia's first university, the Slavik-Greko-Latin Academy, which later moved to the Trinity-St. Sergius monastery in Sergiyev-Posad. The monastery has been closed for 90 years, though Orthodox services have resumed in the monastery's church in 1992, the Bogoyavlensky Cathedral (pictured), built in 1624.

The monastery's busy central location on Nikolskaya Street has made it subject to encroachment from all sides, including below the monastery, where some neighboring landlords illegally expanded underground in order to build a shopping center, undermining the safety of some of the buildings. Nearby, a beer restaurant has been fighting the reopening for years. It will nonetheless be several years before all the buildings of the central monastery are refurbished.

A Piece of Europe

Zurab Tsereteli, a sculptor known for his productivity, has proposed his biggest monument yet. To be called "Europe," the monument is a conglomeration of famous European architectural landmarks and would be approximately 400 meters high – 50 percent higher than the Eiffel tower, and has been proposed for installation at Moscow's Poklonnaya Gora. Tsereteli has lately been living in Paris.



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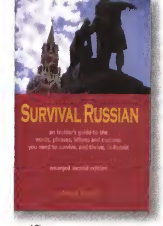
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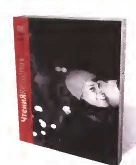
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The monastery's busy central location on Nikolskaya Street has made it subject to encroachment from all sides, including below the monastery, where some neighboring landlords illegally expanded underground in order to build a shopping center, undermining the safety of reopening for years. It will nonetheless be several years before all the buildings of the central monastery are refurbished.

A Piece of Europe

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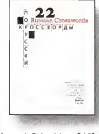
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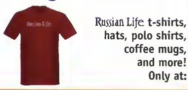


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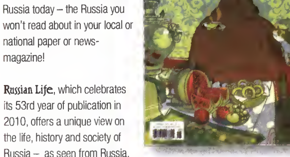
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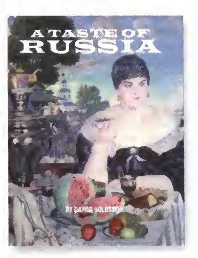
[**URW** • 96 pp. • **$12**]

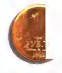
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Russians on the Seine

The Russian government has purchased a plot of land in Paris, on Quai de Branly, with the goal of building a Russian Cultural Center, including an Orthodox church. Russia won a tender to buy the plot, with the Office of Presidential Affairs submitting the winning maximum price bid. Although the price was not disclosed, experts estimate it to be at least €50 million for the .42 hectares (€1,100 per square foot), Svoboda Radio reported.

The idea to build a cultural center in Paris was first expressed by the late Patriarch Alexei II on his 2007 visit to France. Viktor Khrekov, spokesman in the Office of Presidential Affairs, said the center will fit "organically" with the surrounding architecture, and be true to the spirit of Russian and French cultures. Critics meanwhile questioned the value of such spending while hundreds of crumbling churches inside Russia are neglected.

Wi-Sherry

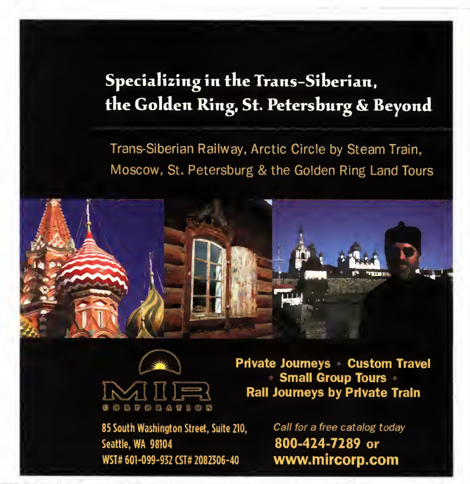
Sheremetyevo airport is now providing free wifi to passengers transiting its F terminal (previously known as Sheremetyevo 2; F services international flights). At present, the free wifi zones will be limited to gate areas, beyond passport control and security check. The airport has promised to eventually expand coverage to include all Sheremetyevo terminals.

Cycling Baikal

At press time, three Americans and two Venezuelans were about halfway through a first-ever Winter Bicycle Circumnavigation of Lake Baikal, to include 43 days entirely on ice. The team is cycling the 2000 kilometer perimeter of the 25 million-year-old lake to create a film documentary and to raise awareness of the environmental concerns in the region. (**cycle-baikal.com**)

Porcelain House

The Museum of Novgorod will open a new "house of porcelain" in 2011 to coincide with a 160th anniversary of the birth of Ivan Kuznetsov, Russia's most famous porcelain tycoon, who owned a chain of workshops in the Russian northwest. The museum will replicate the look and feel of such a workshop and show off the best cobalt-decorated dishes, **travel.ru** reported. The porcelain exhibit will be permanently housed in place of one of the towers of Desyatin Monastery, which has not been preserved.





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TRAVELING

Russian National Orchestra in Concert

Named Moscow's top orchestra in a *Gramophone* magazine poll of international music critics, the RNO has been in demand throughout the music world ever since its 1990 premiere.

European Tour: Baden-Baden, Germany (5/23) • Dresden, Germany (5/30)

rno.ru

WEST

CALIFORNIA

REDMarines Music Festival 2010

Started six years ago as a celebration of a safe return of a few Russian boys (US Marines) from the recent war in Iraq, the Festival has grown to become a major alternative music festival. For more details and festival visit the website. Dates: 06/18/10 to 06/20/10, Indian Valley Reservoir, San Francisco CA (408-480-1767), Tickets: $60.

redmarines.com

Leo N. Tolstoy's Centennial Festival

Presentations, Films, Performances etc. to Commemorate 100 years since the death of Leo Tolstoy. Honorary Chair of the event is Vladimir Tolstoy, great-great grandson of the writer and Director of the Yasnaya Polyana Museum. Festive dinner will conclude the activities. Dates: 10/22/10 to 10/23/10, Karl Anatol Center CSULB, Long Beach CA (562-985-8525), Tickets: Free.

tolstoyfestival.com

WASHINGTON

Eastern Europe, Russia & Central Asia Heritage Camp

Learn more about the cultures of Eastern Europe, Russia & Central Asia. Families will get a chance to relax, make friends, participate in camp activities & learn about these countries & their culture. Dates: 08/20/10 to 08/22/10, Camp Lakeview, Graham WA (206-498-8845), Tickets: $110.

visit russianlife.com/events for link

MIDWEST

MINNESOTA

32nd Annual Balalaika and Domra Association of America Festival Concert

The culmination of a weeklong convention will feature performances by renowned balalaika, bayan, domra, and vocal artists. In addition, a large festival orchestra consisting of accordions, balalaikas, bayans, and domras will perform with select wind and percussion accompaniment. Dates: 07/17/10, Ted Mann Concert Hall, Minneapolis MN (651-227-0960), Tickets: $15.00.

BDAA2010.com

EAST

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Portsmouth Peace Treaty Exhibit

An exhibit explaining the Russian and Japanese history of the Portsmouth Peace Treaty and the formal, informal, back channel and community diplomacy that led to the Treaty of Portsmouth, ending the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War. Dates: 05/22/10 to 10/31/10, John Paul Jones House Museum, Portsmouth NH (603-436-8420), Tickets: $6.

Portsmouth Peace Treaty Day – 105th Anniv

On Sunday, September 5, 2010 an official US Navy salute on the Shipyard mall, followed by a 3:47 pm blast on the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard whistle, will serve as the signal for the bells of Portsmouth and Eliot to ring. Date: 09/05/10, Market Square, Portsmouth NH (603-772-1835), Free.

portsmouthpeacetreaty.org

VERMONT

Views and Re-Views: Soviet Political Posters and Cartoons

Nearly twenty years after the demise of the Soviet Union, *Views and Re-Views* invites a post-Cold War assessment of Soviet graphic arts and presents a stunning array of images spanning more than six decades from the time of the Russian Civil War to the late Soviet period. **Dates:** Through 05/23/10, Fleming Museum, Burlington VT (802-656-0750), Tickets: $5.

flemingmuseum.org

PENNSYLVANIA

Russian Troika Festival

A three-day festival featuring authentic Russian food, drink, gifts, tea room and baked goods. Entertainment by world-renowned folk group Barynya. Friday, May 28 (11 am to 9 pm), Saturday, May 29 (11am to 4pm), Sunday, May 30 (noon to 9pm). Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity, Erie, PA. Admission is free.

churchofthenativity.net

NEW YORK

Russian Icon Exhibit

An exhibit of mosaic icons created in the tradition of Byzantine masters by Oksana Prokopenko, a Ukrainian artist now living in New York. Oksana reassembled the shattered pieces of glass that fell out of the sky when the two World Trade Centers came crashing to the ground into strikingly beautiful, other worldly icons, each composed of hundreds and in some cases thousands of tiny pieces of colored glass. **Dates:** 05/20/10 to 06/13/10, Ukrainian Institute of America, New York NY (212-842-0226), Tickets: free.

oksanapro.com

NEW YORK

Altered States of Reality; an Exhibition of Analog and Digital Photography

The unique and original works of Russian artist Artyom Shulga speak of playfulness and delight. Despite portraying a moment frozen in time, Shulga's photographic images are marked by movement, swirling fields of light and vibrant color that highlight and alter his human subjects. Dates: 04/22/10 to 05/07/10, Agora Gallery, New York.

agora-gallery.com

NEW JERSEY

Seva's Blue Horizon: the Poet Seva Nekrasov and Artists of Unofficial Moscow

Seva (Vsevolod) Nekrasov (1934-2009) was the youngest and probably the most talented of the generation of poets and artists grouped around Lianozovo – one of the earliest and most important centers for underground culture in the Soviet Union. This exhibition commemorates through poetry and art the entire generation of early Soviet underground culture that is vanishing by the day. Dates: Through 05/30/10, The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, NJ (732-932-7237), Tickets: $3.

zimmerlimuseum.rutgers.edu

Also at the Zimmerli:

The George Riabov Collection of Russian Art Over 1,100 works encompass Russian art from the 14th-19th centuries. **The Norton & Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union** The largest and most comprehensive collection of its kind in the world. Comprising more than 17,000 works of Soviet dissident art from the historical Cold War period (1956-1986).

INTERNATIONAL

LONDON

Afternoon with Rachmaninoff

The noted Russian pianist Nikolai Lugansky will give an exclusive interview (with David Nice) providing insight into his interpretation of Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini," prior to performing it with London's Philharmonia Orchestra. For booking details regarding this event and The Rachmaninoff Society contact Margaret Hawkins at RachSocArch@gmail.com Dates: 05/15/10, Royal Festival Hall, London.

rachmaninoff.org

PARIS

Holy Rus: From Kievan Rus to Peter the Great

A major exhibit covering 1000 years of history and including works from the major Russian museums. Part of the Year of Russia-France 2010. Dates: 03/05/10 to 05/24/10, The Louvre, Paris.

louvre.fr

* Complete listings online at russianlife.com

The Pride of Moscow

May 15, 1935: Metro opens

The Coachman's Song, an enduring hit by the great jazz singer Leonid Utyosov, begins with a little interlude where someone calls out, "Hey, coachman!" and Utyosov replies, "I'm not a coachman. I'm a horse operator." Having thus made it clear that he is a full-fledged member of the "modern life" of the 1930s, he then launches into a melancholy lament for bygone days. "I put iron horseshoes on you, I put new lacquer on the carriage. But the Metro came along with its oaken handrails. It immediately cast a spell on all the passengers." And it turns out that the coachman himself is not immune to the latest trends. "Just look how crazy things are turning out. Life is really topsy-turvy when to travel from Sokolniki to harness up, I have to take the Metro to the park."

This song captures how people saw the first Metro line. The underground train, which took on its first passengers at 7:00 a.m. on May 15, 1935, was seen as an amazing triumph of technology, a display of the power of human reason, and, of course an outstanding achievement of the Soviet government.

The night before it opened, crowds of people assembled to wait outside the entrances to the first 13 stations. Peter Latyshev, a foreman from the Red Proletarian Factory, was ceremoniously issued ticket No. 1, Series A. One can assume that it was no coincidence the first passenger was such an ideological archetype – everything that was associated with the Metropolitan was cloaked in a haze of propaganda. The heroic builders of the Metro were on the march! The Soviet public rode down escalators, were given tickets that were good for 35 minutes, and joyously rode "from Sokolniki to the park" and then were even able to transfer to what would later become the Arbat-Pokrovskaya line, to ride all the way to Smolenskaya Station.



IVAN SHAGIN (ITAR-TASS)

The first passengers on the Moscow Metro (May 15, 1935) were also the workers who built the underground. Crowds waited in line overnight outside the first 13 stations, hoping to be among the first to ride the new underground.

Congratulations came flooding into Moscow from across the country and around the globe. The builders of the Paris Metro sent the following breathless message:

You should not be surprised, dear comrades, that news of the launch of the first stage of your underground was a surprise to us. We knew about this great construction project and followed its progress as best we could, just as we are following the progress of your socialist construction overall with pride and enthusiasm. Just a year ago the bourgeois Paris press, with poorly concealed delight, reported that "despite the Bolsheviks' every effort," the construction plan has only been 6 percent completed. Our newspapers did not dispute

this figure. But the bourgeois, and especially the fascist newspapers accompanied this figure with acrimonious commentaries: "There is nothing surprising about the fact that the Bolsheviks arrogantly refused foreign assistance. Are they really up to the task of completing such a construction project, especially given the exceptionally difficult subsurface conditions in Moscow? Where are their engineers? Where will they be able to find thousands of qualified workers? Will their factories really be able to supply the track needed for such a complex apparatus?" And a few of these gentlemen did not deny themselves the pleasure of predicting: "They will scurry around there underground like moles for another year or so, but in the end they will give up and call real builders from reputable international companies to help them." And now we are told that the entire eleven-and-a-half kilometer route is completed, that beneath Moscow run the most comfortable, beautiful, and brightly lit trains!

The night before it opened, crowds of people assembled to wait outside the entrances to the first 13 stations.

The jubilation knew no bounds. That evening a procession was organized to end at *Mossovet* (Moscow's Soviet of People's Deputies, the seat of city government). The newspapers provided a solemn description:

Chant after chant resounds over Victory Square (Long live Comrade Stalin! Long live the organizer of Metro construction, Comrade Kaganovich! Long live the Moscow Committee!) like a powerful victory rumble, while the eyes of all the demonstrators gaze upward, to the balcony of Mossovet, from whence the decorated Moscow Komsomol is greeting Comrades Khrushchev, Starostin, Bulganin, Chervyakov, and others.... There are large portraits of Comrades Stalin, Kaganovich, and Molotov.... Youth marches past... the rail workers of the Moscow-Belorussian-Baltic line... Turning around in front of the Mossovet building, 30 trucks with large portraits of Comrades Stalin, Kaganovich, Molotov, and with the ZIS [Завод имени Сталина or Stalin Factory] symbol above their radiator grilles, are taking their places in front of the Mossovet building to the accompaniment of a band. The youth of the Stalin Car Factory greet Comrade Khrushchev. He tells them that today the proletariat of Moscow is celebrating a great victory – the launch of the Metro's first stage.... Comrade Kaganovich's slogan, "Give us the best Metro in the world," has been brought to life.

During my childhood in the 1960s, the Metro had dozens more stations than the original 13, and in many places you did not need to descend via escalator (лестница-чудесница or "wonder-staircase") to get to the wondrous world of the Metropolitan deep underground, since many platforms were by then under the open sky and the Metro had become an everyday means of transportation that was used daily by thousands and thousands of people. Still, even then, every descent underground was an amazing adventure.

You had to throw a round, five-kopek piece into the slot of the turnstile that let you into wonderland. Then the thrill began. The escalator at my home station, Smolenskaya, took you deep, deep beneath the earth. Smolenskaya was one of the first stations and one that was also planned as a bomb shelter. This is why the road to this wonderland was a slow one, and making your way out of it on the trip home also took a long time, standing on a moving stair and looking at the ceiling, waiting for the moment when the huge five-point star atop the upper lobby would come into view.

The stations had huge, heavy doors, and in the underground stations there were stunning images that even today amaze tourists. Of course there is the beloved Revolution Square station, with its mysterious bronze figures – a border guard with his dogs, a revolutionary with a pistol, workers, a milkmaid. You never tire of looking at them. And the yellow train cars were so unlike ordinary busses or trolleys, and their doors did not open outward, but retracted to the side and bore the stern warning, "Do Not Lean," serving as a reminder of mysterious dangers awaiting passengers in the dark tunnels.

Few knew who Lazar Kaganovich was back then,* or at least nobody thought about it, and the Metropolitan was given Lenin's name, although he had had nothing to do with it. On the other hand, he *was* responsible for everything.

Decades passed. When I finally found myself on the other side of the Iron Curtain, I was interested to learn that many cities have subways. I remember the shock I experienced in London at the Baker Street Station, when I learned it had been around since 1863! Sherlock Holmes could have ridden the underground! I also learned that the appearance of subways in many European cities had such an influence on art that the modern style in some countries is called "Metro style."

We now know that plans to build a Metro in Moscow date back to prerevolutionary times, but the revolution got in the way. Meanwhile, Lenin's name has now disappeared from the doors of the Metropolitan, while Kaganovich's name has recently cropped up in newspapers again, no longer as the hero of the Metro, but as one of Stalin's brutal executioners. Anti-Semites relish saying his name and patronymic – Lazar Moiseyevich – hinting that there was more to his destruction of

* Lazar Moiseyevich Kaganovich (1893-1991) was in Stalin's inner circle from 1930 until his ousting by Khrushchev in 1957, whence he was sent to manage a cement factory. As Moscow city boss, he not only oversaw the Metro's construction, but also the demolition of many Moscow landmarks, including Christ the Savior Cathedral.

the Serpukhov Kremlin than just using its stone in the design of the Metro's Serpukhovskaya Station.* The fact that people from all sorts of ethnic groups were involved in tearing down the ancient buildings and churches was somehow forgotten.

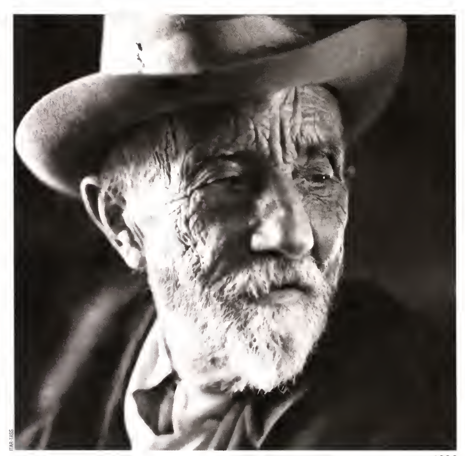
The Metro is increasingly a target for criticism – the crowds, the grime, the age of the train cars – although everyone understands that it is still Moscow's most reliable form of transportation. There are also countless urban legends surrounding the Metro, such as the one about the mysterious underground Metro-2 city, controlled by special forces, or about monsters who inhabit Metro tunnels, threatening brave tunnel explorers. *Metro-2033*, a book and video game by Dmitry Glukhovsky, in which the Moscow Metropolitan is transformed into a world populated by survivors of a nuclear war, has reinforced our image of the amazing world under our feet. The recent decision to restore a poem with a line about Stalin at Kurskaya station has revived one of the real monsters slumbering in the Metro's dark tunnels, and probably not the last.

Of course none of this is as scary as the real-life threat of terrorist bombs, as we were reminded just as this issue was going to press. And given the Metro's role as arteries and veins in and out of the country's heart, we can expect some serious security clampdowns.

Today I live next to the Metro's deepest station, Victory Park (Парк Победы), and every time I descend on the crowded escalator I am still transported into another world. It might not seem as enchanting as it was when I was a child, but there is still something wondrous here. And every time I pass through Revolution Square (Площадь Революции) station I am amazed by the number of serious and harried adults who nevertheless take the opportunity to touch the nose of the bronze dog, something that is supposed to bring good luck. The magic continues.

Transforming Nature

Ivan Michurin: 1855-1935


ITAR-TASS

1932

GIVEN HIS SOCIAL ORIGINS, one would not have expected the Soviet authorities to recognize the horticulturalist Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin, and one certainly would not have expected them to place him on the exalted pedestal this father of Soviet Darwinism occupied by the end of his life.

First, there were the noble ancestors, and even though they were from the lower nobility and not particularly wealthy, they were still members of the "exploiting class." Second, there was the familial estate, and although it was relatively small and acquired with tremendous effort, it was nevertheless "private property." Third, there was the Order of St. Anna awarded to Michurin by the tsarist government. Finally, there was his maniacal focus on simple fruit growing – not heavy industry, not building factories or even increasing wheat yields, simply the cultivation of orchards and the breeding of new sorts of fruits and berries. Given all

* Actually, this is most likely an urban myth.

of the above, one might have expected that, at best, the Soviets would ignore Michurin, and, at worst, they would destroy him along with his countless seedlings and apple varieties.

Michurin, born in 1855, was 62 at the time of the Bolshevik revolution, and he welcomed it from the start, immediately expressing a desire to serve the workers' and peasants' state through his experiments. But there were hordes of such naïve idealists and most of them were swept away by the very government they pledged to serve. But not Michurin. With every year he grew more respected, received more and more Soviet medals to go with his tsarist order, and was increasingly quoted and held up as an example. A Michurinist movement was created, cities and villages were named after him, and in the end he became a truly iconic figure.

"We should not wait for nature to do us favors; our task is to take from it what we need."

Michurin's biography reveals traits that must have appealed to the new authorities: a fanatical devotion to his work; a desire to overcome any obstacle in developing Russian agriculture; years of poverty, during which he expended all his strength, all his energy, on working his land; conflict with the church; and his decision not to accept any of the numerous invitations from scientific colleagues in America, including before the revolution, to continue his work there.

But these traits were not unique to Michurin. What set him apart? The first thing that comes to mind are his famous words, "We should not wait for nature to do us favors; our task is to take from it what we need." It is a line that sums up the essence of Michurin's experiments. This strange self-taught horticulturalist channeled his lifelong enthusiasm into breeding new, more successful varieties of fruits and berries. For the sake of this cause, he and his family almost starved to death, lived first in a hut, then in a shed, then in a tiny house they built with their own hands. For the sake of this cause, they spent virtually all their time in the company of other horticulturists.

Michurin relentlessly researched selection, believing that the crossbreeding of different plants – even plants that were not necessarily close to one another but, in some cases, were "distant relatives" – could lead to amazing breakthroughs in horticulture. Today it is clear that, while some of Michurin's experiments were very successful and others were dead ends, he made significant contributions to the science of selection.

During his early career in horticulture he expressed disdain for the experiments of a strange German monk by the name of Mendel who had discovered some obscure laws governing the transmission of traits through inheritance. He was later convinced by the great biologist Nikolai Vavilov that the laws of genetics could not be ignored and he began to factor them into his experiments. But what the Soviets saw in Michurin had nothing to do with real science.

The introduction to a collection of articles by Michurin that came out after his death states: "I.V. Michurin laid the foundation for a new science, the science of managing the development of plants through breeding. In his scientific career, Michurin followed completely new paths unknown to science before him. He used cultivation breeding methods to create new forms of fruit-bearing plants. Michurin took a scientific approach to the cultivation of hybrid seedlings, eliminating undesirable features and developing desirable ones."

Here is what the government liked most – the notion that plants can be cultivated and forced to grow in accordance with the needs of people, the needs of the government. What a prospect! The author of the introduction continues:

This is the most important thing that Michurin taught us. And it is not surprising that this was the thing most fiercely resisted by the bourgeois, reactionary Weismannist-Morganist school of biology.* Weismannists and Morganists deny that the features and properties acquired by plants or animals in the process of their lives can be passed down through inheritance. Reactionary science claims that you cannot change and improve plants and animals to suit the needs of humans. Such assertions are pseudo-science. They are based on belief in a divine principle in the development of the world, on the idea of man's passive adaptation to the laws of nature. This belief disarms scientists and practitioners in their struggle to change the nature of plants and animals and inhibits the development of science and agriculture. This cannot be called science. Michurin's teachings open up unlimited vistas for biology, especially given the conditions of our Soviet

* A reference to American embryologist Thomas Hunt Morgan and German evolutionary biologist August Weismann who, together with Mendel, were held up by Soviet propaganda as epitomizing "reactionary genetics."

country, given the conditions of the collective farming system.

The Bolsheviks, who were themselves conducting a vast experiment on the entire country, could not fail to appreciate the boldness of Michurin's attempts to alter the fruit varieties created by nature itself. Like all utopian fanatics, the Bolsheviks associated the transformation of society with changing the very essence of man and nature. Even in the 19th century, the socialist Charles Fourier rapturously predicted that under communism the seas would turn to lemonade and harmless anti-lions and anti-whales would appear on earth.

A quarter century after Michurin's death, the Communist Party adopted a program predicting the transformation of human personality and the elimination of any distinction between city and country or physical and mental labor. A decade and a half later, a new project emerged: to change the course of northern rivers in order to irrigate the deserts of Central Asia. Nobody stopped to ponder the damage this would do to the ecology of Northern Russia, it was just so thrilling to turn rivers around and make them flow to the south. How better to demonstrate the greatness of humankind?

The mild-mannered horticulturalist – a person completely devoted to his orchards and biology experiments – started to be placed among such great transformers of the planet, creators of heaven on earth. To help him fit the right mold, biography after biography repeated the tale of how, before the revolution, a priest in the town of Kozlov had accused Michurin of "turning God's garden into a brothel." What better Bolshevik credentials could there be? Michurin had challenged religion! In fact, there is no evidence that Michurin had the slightest inclination of doing anything of the sort. He simply believed that "Using plants in the form in which they exist in nature can bring little benefit. They have to be improved, remade, endowed with useful qualities, and their negative properties have to be eliminated."

Who would argue with this? If plants had not been improved over the course of centuries, we would not today have bread, olive oil, or wine. But how wonderful it was to transform a rather eccentric old man into a hero of atheism who, with the help of the Soviet government, would bring nature to its knees. This image took hold after Michurin's death, when the crazy theories of Trofim Lysenko gained ascendance, the great Vavilov was sent to prison (where he starved to death), and an entire generation of serious biologists were deprived of the ability to practice their science. It was then that the image of the "great Michurin" was implanted in the public consciousness. He was portrayed as someone who had discovered what wonders human reason could achieve, especially if that reason was armed with a knowledge of Marxism-Leninism.

In 1944, when film director Alexander Dovzhenko began to write the script for *Life in Bloom* (Жизнь в цвету), he intended to produce a film about a dreamer living amidst splendid orchards and bringing beauty and joy into people's lives. The film was produced in color, a rarity at the time, and its exquisite camera work turned out striking images of flowering orchards, bright fruits, and an eternally bountiful earth. But such a dreamy and handsome Michurin was of little use to the powers that be. The film had to be almost totally redone, with the insertion of apocryphal episodes depicting Michurin's "relentless fight" against genetics, a pseudo-science and the corrupt handmaiden of capitalism (as opposed to Michurin's own hybridization theories). Even the title was considered too romantic. In 1948, the film opened under the simple title *Michurin*. Its creator was recovering from a heart attack at the time, experienced after the stresses of seeing his film butchered by the censors. It seemed that Michurin, the opponent of genetics and transformer of nature, held a secure place in the communist iconostasis. But something about it rang false. This must be why so many jokes appeared mocking the "great horticulturalist."

Michurin is asked a question.

"You say that if you cut off a horse's tail and then cut off the tails of his offspring and so forth, this will create a new breed of tailless horse?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then why are women still born virgins?"

Or:

A drunk is walking home one evening and reaches a bus stop. Leaning against a tree he looks up and sees a streetlight swaying amidst its upper branches. Impressed, the drunk exclaims, "Wow, Michurin. That's really something. Who woulda' thought?"

And finally, a joke that loses something in translation, but is perhaps the most telling:

It was apparently Michurin who invented barbed wire, since he crossed a grass-snake (уж) *with a hedgehog* (ёж).

Portrait of Alexander Radishchev by an unknown artist, from the State Historical Museum.

RIA NOVOSTI

From St. Petersburg to Moscow

1790: Alexander Radishchev reports

ALEXANDER NIKOLAYEVICH Radishchev was born and came of age at a time when, strange as it may seem from a modern perspective, educated society fully supported its rulers and wanted nothing better than to serve them heart and soul.

The appellation applied to the era of Catherine the Great, "the Golden Age of the Russian Nobility," is remarkably accurate. The nobility rightly felt itself to be the foundation on which the throne rested, with all the rights and obligations this implied. While a half century earlier Peter the Great had felt that his subjects' sole obligation was to fight for him, serve him, and pay taxes to him, after his reign the nobility gradually acquired greater and greater freedom.

First, they were permitted to retire (Peter had presumed that everyone was obligated to serve him until their dying breath). Then schools appeared for the children of the nobility, from which they emerged with the rank of officers, thus eliminating the need for them to serve as soldiers, as they were forced to do under the "tsar-reformer." Next came the practice of signing infants up for service so that, as they grew up, they could also grow in rank. The nobleman increasingly felt himself to be master of his own fate.

This sense was reinforced in 1762 when, a few months before Catherine ascended to the throne, the famous Manifesto on the Freedom of

the Nobility was issued, freeing the nobility from its obligation to serve the crown and allowing them to live wherever they pleased, be it in one of Russia's two capitals, abroad, or on their country estates. Furthermore, it was no longer permitted to subject the nobility to corporal punishment. Gone were the days when Peter could beat his ministers with a staff or when the head of Empress Elizabeth's Secret Chancellery (secret police) could seat a suspect nobleman on a special chair that would drop into an underground chamber, where the immobilized victim would be lashed with a whip.

In Radishchev's day, a nobleman was someone with a keen sense of his own worth, of his special position, endowed with the right to select his own representatives, even if only on the provincial level, someone who knew that he could only be judged by his peers. And this gave him a sense of his importance to the government.

Although the nobility had the right to *not* serve the state, any nobleman who took advantage of this right at too early an age – and not because he was in poor health or wanting to start a family, but simply because he did not wish to serve – was regarded with shock and suspicion. How could one *not* wish to serve the beloved empress? How could one *not* harbor dreams of going to war, helping to push the boundaries of the empire outward and at the same time covering one's chest with well-deserved medals? How could one *not* long to advance through the ranks of government service?

Virtually any member of the noble estate could proudly proclaim, "this is my government." It protects me, endows me with rights, and I therefore conscientiously and voluntarily serve it.

Alas, there was another side to this rosy picture. The nobility's rights and freedoms were inextricably bound with their power over the peasants. In Peter's day it might have seemed that landowners could not have wielded any more power than they already did. However, subsequent decades showed this was not the case. The more freedom from the state the nobility acquired, the greater freedom they enjoyed as masters of their own estates. These people, so proud of the fact that they could only be judged by those elected from among their peers, acted as judge and jury of their own peasants and could send them into exile or even forced labor in Siberia.

Landowners swore an oath of allegiance to the crown on behalf of their peasants. This might not seem a terribly important detail, but it speaks volumes about the peasants' place in society. Landowners increasingly sold peasants without their land, selling just a few individuals (instead of an entire village) to a new owner, thereby tearing people from their native land without a second thought for the fact that relatives and loved ones were being separated from one another.

And here is what is amazing. All these educated, self-confident noblemen, filled with such enlightened thoughts and sentiments, completely failed to see any contradiction in the order of things. The liberty and calm that they enjoyed seemed in no way incompatible with the peasants' slavery. The fact that the government protected some and oppressed others seemed completely natural and justified to them, or at least to the vast majority of them.

All these educated, self-confident noblemen, filled with enlightened thoughts and sentiments, completely failed to see any contradiction in the order of things.

The Pugachev Rebellion (1774-1775), with its wild excesses and horrible brutality, did not awaken landowners to the idea that oppression should be relaxed. Quite the contrary, to them the peasants were savages who could not be given freedom. They had to be kept in check. If enlightened philosophers and writers did find someone to blame, it was those evil, cruel landowners who did not take sufficient care of their peasants. There was nothing wrong with the system itself.

But then something interesting started to happen. The freedom that had been given to some at the expense of others began to gradually change people's consciousness. Some started to think that it was shameful to own human beings, as if they were chattel. Why this occurred to some people but not others we may never know.

What was it that the pious Nikolai Radishchev did differently in raising his son Alexander to render him incapable of accepting the state of affairs that everyone else had grown accustomed to from childhood? What books did this civil servant, philosopher, and poet read before he retired and devoted his life to literature and contemplation? What was it that he discussed with his Freemason friends, what kind of improvements to humanity was he dreaming about when he sat down at his desk and penned the words, "I look around me and my soul is wounded by the suffering of mankind"? It was after this that he described a *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* that he supposedly made, during which, in each village, he saw human sorrow and degradation, lives destroyed by slavery, families torn asunder, behavior incompatible with human nature.

The freedom that had been given to some at the expense of others began to gradually change people's consciousness.

In essence, Alexander Radishchev was a creation of that same golden era, of those same noble freedoms that were granted by the government over the previous decades. For a long time, historians and literary scholars considered Radishchev a revolutionary and turned him into an unbending foe of the regime. And indeed, the empress herself, upon reading his book, exclaimed, "Here we have a rebel worse than Pugachev." But if we read Radishchev's book carefully, we see that he was counting on a wise monarch who would prove capable of not only punishing cruel landowners, but changing the entire system.

Radishchev was writing about the same things that the empress herself had been dreaming of for many years. Catherine had been planning to free the serfs. Well educated and raised on the ideas of the Enlightenment, the empress understood the immorality of slavery only too well, and also the harm it was doing to the country. But the idea of opposing the nobility was daunting – what if they were to depose her the way she had deposed her own husband? Catherine dragged her feet and assuaged her conscience with half measures – punishing the sadistic Saltychikha (the sobriquet for Darya Saltykova, a noblewoman notorious for torturing and killing her serfs), permitting peasants to start their own businesses (perhaps a third estate would gradually take shape?), and of course by focusing attention on education.

If she could only create new sorts of Russians through education, imbue them with new ideas, a love of goodness and justice, then maybe they would appreciate the reforms she was planning but kept delaying. New institutions of learning were appearing, wonderful books were being translated and published, journals were being founded that promoted enlightened thought.

Indeed it was Catherine herself, when Radishchev spent part of his youth at her court as a page, who did more to educate him than his own father or the teachers at the university *gymnasium* and the professors of Leipzig University. Intentionally or not, she instilled in him new thinking and a love of liberty. In him, she had created someone who would have been prepared to support her reforms, who was counting on her. Alas, it was too late.

In 1790, when *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* came out, Catherine was no longer the woman she had been in her youth. France was in the throes of revolution (begun the year before) and she was asking herself who was responsible. Was it her beloved Voltaire, Diderot, and other Enlightenment philosophers – the very ones whose ideas she had instilled in young Radishchev? Fears like these are why, instead of the monarch's approval, Alexander Radishchev earned a path to prison, to trial, and to a death sentence (commuted by the empress to ten years exile in Siberia). He returned home a broken man, for whom a reprimand by the authorities and an empty threat of another term of exile was enough to lead him to take his own life during the liberal reign of Alexander I.

Seeing Red

I AM NOT ASHAMED to say that this issue's column was inspired by toilet paper. **Точне́е** (rather), by a recent purchase of toilet paper at an itinerant Moscow **рынок** (market), otherwise known as a row of trucks and minivans parked by the side of the road, selling their cargo.

The product in question was branded "**Кра́сная цена́**" ("Red Price") and the paper, produced by the Adischevskaya Paper Factory in Kostroma region, reminded me of my favorite American idiom: "you get what you pay for" (or, in bureaucrat-Russian: **соотноше́ние цены́ и ка́чества** – price/value ratio).

In fact, **кра́сная цена́** is an idiom related to haggling (**торгова́ться**). What visitor to Russia hasn't heard that "red in Russian often meant beautiful, hence Red Square." But when applied to **ценóобразование** (pricing), things get more complicated. *The Dictionary of Economic Terms* gives the following definition: "**Кра́сная цена́ — цена́ сде́лки, удовлетвори́вшая и продавцо́в и покупа́телей**" ("Red price – the price of a deal that satisfies both sellers and buyers"). But I prefer the definition in the dictionary of the Russian Language Institute: "**Са́мая высо́кая цена́, кото́рую мо́жно дать за что-ли́бо**" (the highest price one is willing to pay for something).

Quite often the buyer is not happy with the seller's price. As a proverb from Dal's dictionary has it: **У купца́ своя́ цена́, у покупа́теля – своя́** (The merchant has his price, and the seller has his.) So, if you are haggling for, say, a samovar at Izmailovo Flea Market, you can say: "**Кра́сная цена́ твоему́ самова́ру – сто до́лларов**" ("My red price for your samovar is $100"). Note the use of the dative.

This line would be perfect, for instance, if the seller first used the cliché line, "**Е́сли бу́дете покупа́ть, це́ну сба́влю.**" ("If you are going to buy it, I'll cut the price.") A synonym for **сба́вить** is **ски́нуть** (to slash).

If you find a price to be prohibitive, you can express your outrage with, "**Э́то грабёж**" ("That's a rip-off"). Or: "**Креста́ на тебе́ нет**" ("You don't bear a cross" i.e. you are ungodly, shame on you). A piquant, old Russian line would be, "**Каку́ю це́ну заломи́л!**" ("You've really jacked up the price!"). And a good starting position for any haggler is a casual, "**Ла́дно, беру́ за полцены́**" ("Oh, alright, I'll take it for half-price").



CARTOON: VIKTOR BOGORAD

Of course, there are plenty of times when haggling is out of the question and you just have to pay the going rate. In Ilf and Petrov's classic novel *The Twelve Chairs*, the smooth operator Ostap Bender extorts money from all manner of less-than-honest Soviet bureaucrats. They regard their payments as bribes. When one mark tries to minimize the damage, Bender's sidekick, Ippolit Matveyevich ("Kisa") intones, "**Я ду́маю, торг здесь не уме́стен.**" ("I believe haggling is inappropriate here.") This has become a **крыла́тая фра́за** (literally a "winged phrase," a catchphrase) which is often creatively paraphrased in modern day Russia. Recently I spotted the following ad in the paper **Из рук в ру́ки** (*From Hand to Hand*): **Тойо́та, 2006 го́да вы́пуска, пробе́г 50000 км, $15000, торг уме́стен** (2006 Toyota, 50,000 km, $15 000, haggling appropriate). And in a recent political article about Russo-Ukrainian gas negotiations, the headline read: **Росси́я дово́льна га́зовыми контра́ктами с Украи́ной, но торг уме́стен** ("Russia is happy with its gas contracts with Ukraine, but haggling is appropriate"). Ultimately the two sides found their **кра́сная цена́**.

But back to my story. I was seeing red, unhappy with the **потреби́тельская сто́имость** of the "Red Price" toilet paper. **Потреби́тельская сто́имость** ("use value") is an economic term that indicates a product's quality, its capacity to satisfy a consumer's specific need. So I visited another **рынок**. There I was bowled over by the marketing creativity of the Syassky Paper Factory, based in Leningrad region. They had named their product "**Мя́гкий знак**" ("Soft sign", i.e. **ь**). I bought a 12-pack without even trying to **торгова́ться**, thinking that **торг здесь неуме́стен**.

It was a sort of an impulse buy (**това́р импульси́вного спро́са**). But I have to say that the **ь** lived up to its name.



DEFENDING *Sevastopol*

Story by
Karina Klimenko

Photography by
Andrei Gusachenko

Sevastopol is a city of monuments and squares. Dour statues of Admirals Nakhimov, Lazarev and Ushakov dominate the squares named for them. There are, in fact, over 1,400 monuments in this naval city. But there is no monument to the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of children who died in Sevastopol during the first (1854-1855) or second (1941-1942) defenses of the city, or the many who died digging up unexploded munitions since then.

This blank spot in the city's history is a central theme in Vladislav Krapivin's novel, *Three from the Carronade Square*, written in the 1970s and recently made into a television miniseries. The series has ignited local debate about the need for a monument. But first the fictional Carronade Square must be found.

The most likely candidate is Sixth Bastion (*Shestaya Bastionnaya*), a small street in the old city. During the Great Patriotic War, the headquarters for Sevastopol's defense forces and a cannon battery were located not far from here. Indeed, the slope of the hill resembles the one described in the story. The remains of fortress walls rise up on the left. Shabby stone steps plummet down the slope. The place is empty, calm and flooded with sunlight. The ground is paved with old cobblestones; dry, pointed grass grows up between the stones; garbage from nearby houses is scattered about (the navy has long since



Artillery Bay on the Sevastopol waterfront. So named because, when the city was first built, this is where warehouses for powder and magazines were first built.

stopped picking it up); troops of stray cats pace the yards; dogs gather near marketplaces.

"I will do all the stone work!" says Vladimir Drevetnyak, gesturing boldly about the would-be Carronade Square. "We'll bring young trees and clear the garbage. Wouldn't that be great! What a view of the Northern Bay and Konstantin's Ravelin!"

Drevetnyak was born in Sevastopol, works with stone and is studying at the Crimean Agrotech University to get his third or fourth diploma. He has a small stone-working factory, and his monuments and memorial tablets can be seen in Simferopol, just two hours away.

"Several million years' warranty," Vladimir exclaims.

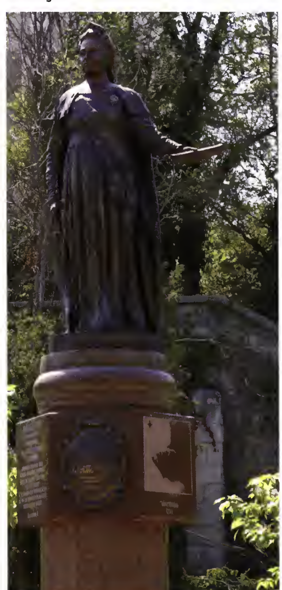
Catherine's City

The Crimea Peninsula has been inhabited (and fought over) by Eastern European peoples – from Cimmerians and Bulgars to Goths, Huns and Tatars – for over 10,000 years. One of Sevastopol's more recent predecessors on the southwestern tip of the peninsula was the ancient Greek port city of Chersonesos, founded in the fifth century BC. Its well-preserved ruins are still visible west of the city.

As a modern naval base, the city, first named Akhtiar, dates to 1783. The following year Empress Catherine II ("the Great") ordered Grigory Potemkin to establish a fortress on the site and name it Sevastopol, meaning "venerable

city."* Alexander Suvorov, the legendary military leader, was put in charge of building the fortress. "There is no harbor like this, not only around this peninsula, but in the entire Black Sea, where the navy would be as safe and the officers on the ships would feel as comfortable and secure," Suvorov wrote. For his efforts, the empress gave Suvorov a golden snuffbox inlaid with diamonds. On the 200th anniversary of the fort's founding, a bust of Suvorov (in Suvorov Square) was unveiled. A monument to Catherine was not erected until 2008, on the city's 225th anniversary. And not without a fight. In fact, the struggle for this monument reflected the larger battle between Russians and Ukrainians for control of the Crimea.

The monument to Catherine the Great was unveiled in 2008, the 225th anniversary of the city's founding.

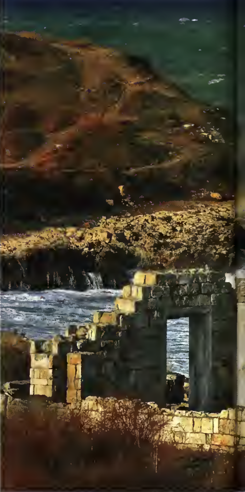


The Crimean Peninsula became part of the Russian Empire in 1774, after Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774. The peninsula was an independent republic within the USSR from 1921-1945, and part of the Russian Republic, within the USSR, until 1954, when it was gifted by then leader Nikita Khrushchev to the Ukrainian Republic. The change meant little for the next 37 years, as long as the Soviet Union still existed. But then, starting in 1991, rifts began to develop between the post-Soviet states of Russia and Ukraine, many of which played out in Crimea.

Today, most residents of Sevastopol, and of Crimea generally, speak and think in Russian.† Yet, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, they have all become Ukrainian citizens. This has led to some sticky political situations. For instance, the mayor of Sevastopol is appointed by the Ukrainian president, while the City Council is directly elected by the residents and thus pro-Russian. The two institutions rarely agree.

"Who's more important – legislative or executive power?" Drevetnyak storms. "It's clear from the name that the legislative takes the lead. The mayor is subordinate to the law, and that's how it should be! Still, the Executive Court of Kiev decided that the Sevastopol City Council will be subordinated to municipal authorities. This is against the constitution!"

In short, the city council voted to put up a monument to Catherine, but the mayor's office said no. Which led to the ironic situation in which both the council's decision to erect the monument and the mayor's decision to remove it were legal. The statue went up and a group of passionate locals pitched their tents around





* From 1797 to 1826, the base was actually renamed Akhtiar, upon a decree by Tsar Paul I. During the German occupation, the Nazis renamed the city Theodorichhafen.

† According to the last Ukrainian census (2001), 76.6% of Crimean residents consider Russian their native tongue.





Catherine, to guard against her removal.

In the end, the mayor backed down and the statue stayed. Today Catherine Square is calm and full of flowers. Catherine graciously extends a hand with a charter that reads, "There will be a town."

City By The Bays

Sevastopol has not one harbor, but several: *Kazachya*, *Karantinnaya*, *Korabelnaya*, the Bay of Matyushenko, and others. It is pleasant to stroll the city at sunset or early in the morning, under its famous chestnut trees, before the sun scorches the white stone walls, before souvenir vendors fill the streets along the waterfront. This difference between the morning calm and the tourist bustle is especially distinct in nearby Balaklava, which was transformed into a tourist district after the warships were pulled out and a submarine maintenance works closed down.

Balaklava, about 15 kilometers from downtown Sevastopol, is full of fishermen, yachtsmen and underwater archaeologists mining for the plentiful ancient and medieval artifacts buried along the coast. Babushkas sell corn on the cob for four *hryvnas* apiece, and boatmen offer tourists rides to Jasper Beach, at the foot of Cape Fiolent, where you can visit St. George Monastery, which dates to 891. Yet it is only in the morning that you will enjoy a moment of calm to observe the old homes, with their tile roofs, and the dilapidated Genovese towers rising above the mouth of Balaklava Bay.

For all the efforts to make Sevastopol into a tourist city, the biggest challenge may not be infrastructure but psychology. A photographer related how he was riding on the St. Petersburg-Sevastopol train and an officer stated that Sevastopol's future was in tourism. The photographer asked if the officer could say, "What would you like?"

"Me? Of course not!"

Excavation of Chersonesos did not begin until 1827. The city existed for nearly 2000 years and was connected with the histories of Ancient Greece, Rome and Byzantium.

A Ukrainian freighter enters the narrow Bay of Balaklava, above which loom the towers of the Genovese fort of Chembala. The beautiful city of Balaklava has appeared in the writings of Homer, Pushkin, Kuprin and others.



Remains of the Genoese fort of Chembalo at Balaklava, and more recent construction, as seen from the water.

"What about your grown-up son? Can he?"

"Are you kidding? He's an officer's son."

And not many can. Sevastopolians must, like the residents of Yalta and Sochi, learn the etiquette of service. One wonders if it is possible before 2017, when Ukraine's lease agreement with the Russian Navy runs out.

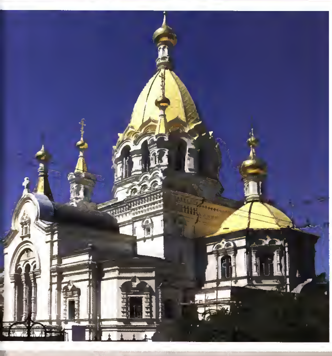
Alexander Ivanovich Shevtsov – Ivanych for short – has certainly learned the proper etiquette. He takes tourists sailing on his yacht, playing guitar and singing songs about Sevastopol and the sea, telling stories about Balaklava and about how much the writer Alexander Kuprin,* loved this part of town. Kuprin was a frequent visitor to Balaklava and turned into an alcoholic after he became popular. He once famously sent a letter to Emperor Nicholas II announcing Balaklava as an independent state. The emperor's chancellery returned the letter with the following note: "You drink too much, Alexander Ivanovich." A monument to Kuprin perches on the waterfront.

MANY RUSSIAN AUTHORS lived and wrote in Sevastopol. There are references, clear or subtle, to this city in the works of Konstantin Stanyukovich (the author of *Sea Stories*), Leo Tolstoy, who fought here at the Fourth Bastion, and Konstantin Paustovsky. Vladimir Dal began work on his thesaurus in Sevastopol, and the tangled streets of Artilleriyskaya Slobodka remind one of the towns Zurbagan and Liss, from the mind of the romantic writer Alexander Grin: "The small houses appear here and there amid the illusory streets… the town emerged from the crumbs of cliffs and hills linked by stairs… and narrow spiral trails."

Yet few small houses remain in Artilleriyskaya Slobodka. The older ones are occupied by lonely pensioners; as they change hands, new owners generally tear them down. The neighborhood is a quiet place, with white walls and red tile roofs roasting in the sun and ladder-stairs jumping out of nowhere and diving into the narrow alleys between blind walls.

Krapivin's Carronade Square would fit in with the toponymy of this neighborhood: many nearby bastions, including the Sixth and the Seventh, used seaborne carronade cannons (manufactured by the Scottish company Carron in the 19th century, thus the name). When the Crimean War defense of the city began in 1854, the navy took charge of the ground forces, brought the cannons ashore and started building fortifications. The city prepared to defend itself from the sea (Russia famously scuttled over a dozen ships at the entrance to Sevastopol Bay, to prevent the allied fleet from entering), but all the British, French and Turkish attacks came by land.

* Alexander Ivanovich Kuprin (1870-1938) is best known for his novel, *The Duel*.







Clockwise from top: Konstantinovsky Ravelin, built in 1840 at the entrance to Sevastopol Bay. Vineyards on the road to Balaklava. A monument to WWII Hero City Sevastopol erected in 1977. Warships at rest in the city's docks. Pokrovsky Cathedral (1905) was heavily damaged in WWII, but restored and used as a house of worship until the 1960s. It was returned to the church in 1992.



The siege lasted for 349 days, ending only when Russian forces lost the Malakhov redoubt and retreated, leading to Russia's defeat in the Crimean War.

Despite the fact that the cadets and younger children who had helped fix the fortifications had been pulled from the city, many stayed behind, fought alongside and often instead of their parents when gunners, soldiers and marines fell from canister shots, shrapnel and bullets. They cleaned hospital wards, brought gunners *kvas*, water, bread and clean clothes, retrieved faulty bombs, spent bullets and rounds, often for cash: half a pood* of rounds cost one silver *kopek*, and one pood of bullets – four *kopeks*. Yet most of the children's names are lost to history.

"Basically, we look for names in old guide books and try to extract them from the documents," says Elena Gavrisheva, of the Sevastopol Defense Museum's Department of Pre-Revolutionary History. "However, there is not much information. For example, we know that 16-year-old Dionisy Toluzakov was killed and buried at Bratskoye Cemetery, or that 15-year-old Darya Shestoperova got a medal. Yet, at the end of the day, there are no names or dates even in the Naval Library. And we need to constantly remind people about those kids; we must remember them..."

Names of young defenders from the second defense (1941-1942) are more easily found. Valerik Volkov from the 7th Marine Infantry Brigade was the author of a handwritten newspaper, *Okopnaya Pravda* (*The Trench Truth*); he was killed in the summer of 1942. There were some children in the same brigade who survived the war to witness the victory, but the boys from Arbuzov's guerilla platoon, most of whom were 14-17 years old, did not make it.

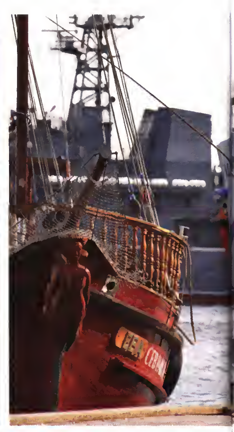
When the war was over, children again gathered spent munitions. Writer Gennady Cherkashin was still a boy when he returned to liberated Sevastopol from evacuation. He remembers how boys searched the steppe for copper. Even ten years ago, boys would find pocketfuls of scrap from the 35th Battery – part of the long defense line during the war, where tens of thousands perished with their backs to the sea. The battery was looted in the 1990's, but you can still see gangs of boys and amateur archaeologists with metal detectors roaming what were once the front lines. Both find old medals, badges with names and addresses of German and Soviet soldiers, and spent cartridges. Sometimes boys find more dangerous remnants and get injured when they suddenly go off.

Tunnels and galleries that stretch for miles in the thick rock under Sevastopol are another danger. Many were made during the Crimean War siege.

"Some boys found a way into the underground tunnels in spring," says Elena Sergeyeva, a tour guide who is also lobbying the city for a Carronade Square monument. "They suffocated – set some boxes

Monument to Eduard Totleben, the engineer who headed the defense of Sevastopol during the Crimean War.





* **POOD**: an old Russian measure of weight equivalent to 16.8 kilograms.

on fire and couldn't get out. Three boys were still outside. They got scared their friends hadn't returned and called for help. A policeman went down to help the boys, but he suffocated, too. It was his day off, but he went there anyway. Later, doctors said to his wife: 'Your husband was a very strong man. With that concentration of carbon monoxide, he got very far.'"

The Third Stand

In 1886, the first marine yacht club was opened in Sevastopol, under the patronage of Tsar Alexander III. The club is nestled in the ruins of a fort built during the Crimean War, at the mouth of Sevastopol Bay. Hundreds of naval officers and civil sailors have studied here. In the Soviet era, the yacht club was a training site for USSR, European and world champions. The club was completely destroyed during the Second World War, but competitions resumed in 1949.

"We sailed on anything we could find or fix," says instructor Eduard Mikhailovich Puzach. "Later, we got some trophy boats from Italy, Germany and Holland. Why not?! The enemy took ours; can't we do the same?!"

Eduard is a former naval officer, a connoisseur of Crimean wine and an artist. At the club, he teaches children to sail and believes they have a mission to preserve the traditions dating back to 1886. "We do exactly what we are supposed to," he says. "Train the best sailors for the Navy."

But times are hard for the club. The club's fleet does not get any new boats, and sailboats must be fixed on site, at the instructors' expense; children do not pay tuition. "Well, life's full of hardships!" Puzach says. "We do our best here."

That could well be the city's motto for the last 20 years, during which the primary battle lines have been defined by language, and ethnic Russians feel themselves under siege from the government in Kiev.

Hundreds of years ago, when the peninsula was under the absolute rule of the Crimean Khans, the Chersonese, St. George's and other monasteries were allowed to continue functioning. Indeed, the Khan even financed Christian monasteries – it helped him keep in touch with what was going on inside them. Many observers wonder why Kiev cannot adopt a similar tolerance toward the Russian language. After all, it is not that local residents dislike Ukrainian – on the contrary, the adults of today often visited their grandparents in Central and Western Ukraine and loved their soft, rich language, so close to their own.

It is compulsion that people reject. In a country where most citizens speak and think Russian, product labels, medical prescriptions, legal proceedings and business documentation are now exclusively in Ukrainian. Yet at the same time, judges and notaries often do not know sufficient Ukrainian, and it can take three people and a dictionary to translate something from Russian.





The Monastery of St. Clement nestles into a recess quarried out of a mountain. For centuries, the quarry has been a source for dense white stone used to face countless buildings.

Still, under a new directive of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education, schools have until September 2012 to transfer all education into Ukrainian. Parents, teachers and children are protesting this "innovation," not because the language is difficult, but because it limits students' opportunities. Why not, after all, preserve the study of Russian – a U.N. language, while at the same time teaching Ukrainian?



The picturesque Grafskaya Wharf, originally built with a ceremonial staircase for the 1787 visit of Catherine the Great.

The language impasse has been compounded by the ongoing passport debacle. Since the mid-1990s, when residents visited municipal authorities to obtain any sort of certificate, they had to hand in their (Soviet) passports. When they were returned to them, they bore a stamp saying, in Ukrainian, "*Gromodyanin Ukrainy*" (Citizen of Ukraine). Many did not want the stamp and thus avoided municipal authorities. They believed that, as long as they did not have a stamp of citizenship, some part of Russia remained. Some even damaged their passports trying to erase the stamp.

Later, commanders at the Russian naval base began to issue supplements to Soviet passports which confirmed that the bearers were Russian citizens. Such supplements were only supposed to be issued to military personnel and family members, but rumor had it that eventually half of Sevastopol's residents obtained such supplements (which were later invalidated), because in Sevastopol everyone works (directly or indirectly) for the Russian navy or is somehow related to a military family.

Interestingly, many residents received Russian passports and did not turn in their Ukrainian passports, which they had gotten in exchange for their old Soviet ones. By some estimates, half of Sevastopolians have dual citizenship, even though neither Russia nor Ukraine allows this. It is not uncommon to see someone on the Sevastopol–St. Petersburg or Sevastopol–Moscow train acting a bit nervous at the border: is this the Russian or Ukrainian side? Which passport should they show?

The passport issue became even stickier in the wake of the Russia-Georgia War of 2008. One of the reasons given by the Russian government for its incursion into North Ossetia was to protect Russian citizens – i.e. those holding Russian passports, rumored to have been distributed in large quantities in the months leading up to the invasion. "Ukraine can no longer close its eyes to the problem of dual citizenship," read an official statement at the time. "Representatives of certain pro-Russian parties declare that on the peninsula [as a whole] there are about 170,000 citizens of the Russian Federation." The government only accepted that there were 15,000, all connected to the naval presence.

It may seem like the city is in the midst of a third siege. But that would be overstating things. Sevastopol is not just an old warrior bristling with solemn monuments. Yes, it is majestic and sunlit, but it is also full of roadside vendors, colorful flowers and lanky seaport tomcats. It is not fully Ukrainian, but neither is it fully Russian. In some

ways, it is still rather Soviet. People still buy newspapers in Soyuzpechat kiosks, although *Soyuz* – the Union – fell apart almost 20 years ago. You can still buy cold draught *kvas* from trailer tanks for 4 *hryvnas* a liter or "half a loaf of white bread" in a warm, sweet-smelling *bulochnaya* where golden loaves lie stacked on tall racks. Rosy-cheeked shopgirls look at you kindly and will even cut you a quarter of a loaf, no questions asked. (Just try that in Moscow!)

A recipient of decades of military subsidies, Sevastopol is crowded with expensive Lebanese cedars, beaches – although worn with time – covered with specially-delivered pebbles and sand, and fitted out with wave-breakers and piers. The Soviet government was good at large-scale construction projects, and, after the Great Patriotic War, the decimated city was completely rebuilt in just ten years. New plants and educational institutions had the smartest staff, and the Navy got the best officers. Men got free apartments, worked and got married – mostly to school teachers and librarians. Which may explain this exchange between two children, overheard on a downtown street:

"What are you doing, *kholop*?"*

"What?! I am no *kholop*! Look at yourself first!"

Of course, children have other games to play, too. They ride roller-skates (and fight and swear) and ride their skateboards on Primorsky Boulevard. There, by the Aquarium, touring musicians play at sunset on summer days, and benches are occupied by German, Italian and American tourists who watch the hot, red sun bounce off the white façade of Konstantin's Ravelin... and lanky cats skulk nearby – they think these are *their* benches...

Outside an open window, the yard is overgrown with grapes, walnut trees and dry grass. Laundry is drying on the lines. The *kholop* dispute came from a passing gang of six-year-olds with bronze skin and sun-faded hair. Dashing between the fluttering sheets, surely none of them were thinking about political squabbles between Ukraine and Russia; they likely did not know that the Russian navy will soon leave this fort city or that many kids their age died defending Sevastopol. They don't need to think about this, because the weather is great and the huge boulders at the ancient Greek town of Chersonesos – perfect for diving into the warm Black Sea – are just ten minutes away. RL

Monument to Scuttled Ships. Emblem for the city, it was built in 1905 to memorialize the ships scuttled in 1854-1855 at the entrance of the harbor, to keep British and French warships from entering during the Crimean War.



* **KHOLOP** – lackey, indentured slave, is an historical term from the time of serfdom that is only found in literature.

Hero of Two Nations





By Irina Titova

Joseph Beyrle is believed to be the only U.S. soldier to fight in both American and Soviet units during World War II. That distinction, along with the fact that his son, John Beyrle, is the current U.S. Ambassador to Russia, made Beyrle the focus of a special St. Petersburg exhibition opened on the eve of the 65th anniversary of Russia's victory over the Nazis.

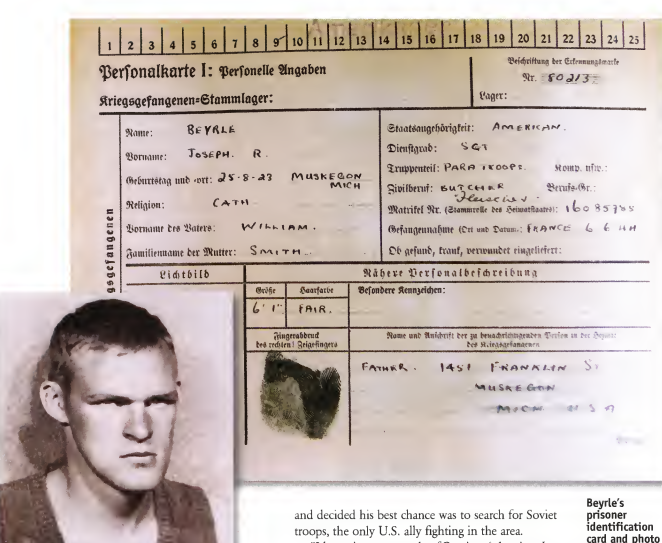
The exhibition, "Joseph R. Beyrle – A Hero of Two Nations," presents 260 artifacts from Beyrle's life and military career, including a collection of his medals, uniform and photographs. Beyrle's war began on D-day and ended near Berlin, in a Soviet tank battalion.

Beyrle parachuted into Normandy on June 6, 1944. But after an unlucky landing he lost contact with his unit and was isolated. He nonetheless managed to explode a Nazi electrical substation and toss grenades into a group of Nazi soldiers.

Soon, however, Beyrle was captured. Battered and starved, Beyrle, a member of the 101st Airborne's "Screamin' Eagles," was tortured and interrogated as he moved through seven Nazi prison camps.

American troops found his dog tags on another body, presumably a Nazi spy, on Utah Beach. The War Department registered Beyrle as killed in action, and his parents held a memorial service back home in Muskegon, Michigan.

But then, four months later, they received a postcard. Beyrle, aided by the Red Cross, had sent a



1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25

Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben

Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager:

Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke
Nr. 80213

Lager:

Name: BEYRLE
Vorname: JOSEPH. R.
Geburtstag und -ort: 25-8-23 MUSKEGON MICH
Religion: CATH
Vorname des Vaters: WILLIAM.
Familienname der Mutter: SMITH

Staatsangehörigkeit: AMERICAN.
Dienstgrad: SGT
Truppenteil: PARA TROOPS. Komp. usw.:
Zivilberuf: BUTCHER Fleischer Berufs-Gr.:
Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatstaates): 16085785
Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): FRANCE 6 6 44
Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert:

Lichtbild

Nähere Personalbeschreibung

Größe	Haarfarbe	Besondere Kennzeichen:
6' 1"	FAIR.	

Fingerabdruck des rechten Zeigefingers

Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen

FATHER. 1451 FRANKLIN ST
MUSKEGON
MICH. U S A

Beyrle's prisoner identification card and photo when he was in Nazi captivity. Opposite page: A decidedly more cheerful Beyrle before heading off to Europe.

short note informing them that he was being held as a POW and was "fine."

In reality, he was far from fine. He had lost a third of his body weight. He twice attempted to escape and failed. But the third time, in January 1945, proved lucky. He escaped Stalag 3-C POW camp in Alt Drewitz and, after running for a day, got his bearings and decided his best chance was to search for Soviet troops, the only U.S. ally fighting in the area.

"I knew just two words of Russian: '*Americansky tovarishch*' [American comrade]," Beyrle once recalled. With his hands in the air, he called out to the Soviet troops. He then won their trust by using his demolition skills to blow up trees that had been hindering the Soviet tank brigade's advance.

Beyrle's son, Ambassador John Beyrle, attended the opening of the exhibition and said his father really did not tell his children much about his experiences in captivity. But the veteran's two sons and daughter did manage to extract some information from him about his two weeks fighting with Soviet troops.

"For instance," Beyrle said, "since we were children, we tortured him with the question of whether he drank vodka with Russians. Our father smiled and said that he did. He said they usually toasted Stalin, Roosevelt and Studebaker." (Thousands of Studebaker



Joseph Beyrle and his son, current U.S. Ambassador to Russia, on Red Square in 2004.

trucks were supplied to the Red Army under Lend-Lease.)

Beyrle said that, for his entire life, his father "was extremely grateful to Russians – who saved him." And his children inherited his gratitude.

Beyrle fully intended to finish the war with his Soviet unit, but as they advanced on Berlin, he was seriously wounded by a German attack. Recovering in a Russian field hospital, he met Russian Marshal Georgy Zhukov, who gave him a letter of transit to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, from whence he could make his way home to Muskegon.

Yet, after arriving in Moscow, Beyrle faced an unusual problem. When the embassy contacted Washington, they were informed that Beyrle was on the list soldiers killed in action. So Beyrle had to spend a month in Moscow's Metropol Hotel, waiting to be identified.

Soon after his return to the U.S., Beyrle married. His wedding took place in the same church and was presided over by the same priest who held a requiem mass for Beyrle just a little over a year previous.

After the war, Beyrle returned to Russia several times and traveled widely, despite complications from his war wounds, recounting his story to school and community groups. He wore a vest on which American medals hung on one side, and Soviet medals on the other.

John Beyrle said that, although his father was called "a hero of the two nations," he always rejected the label.

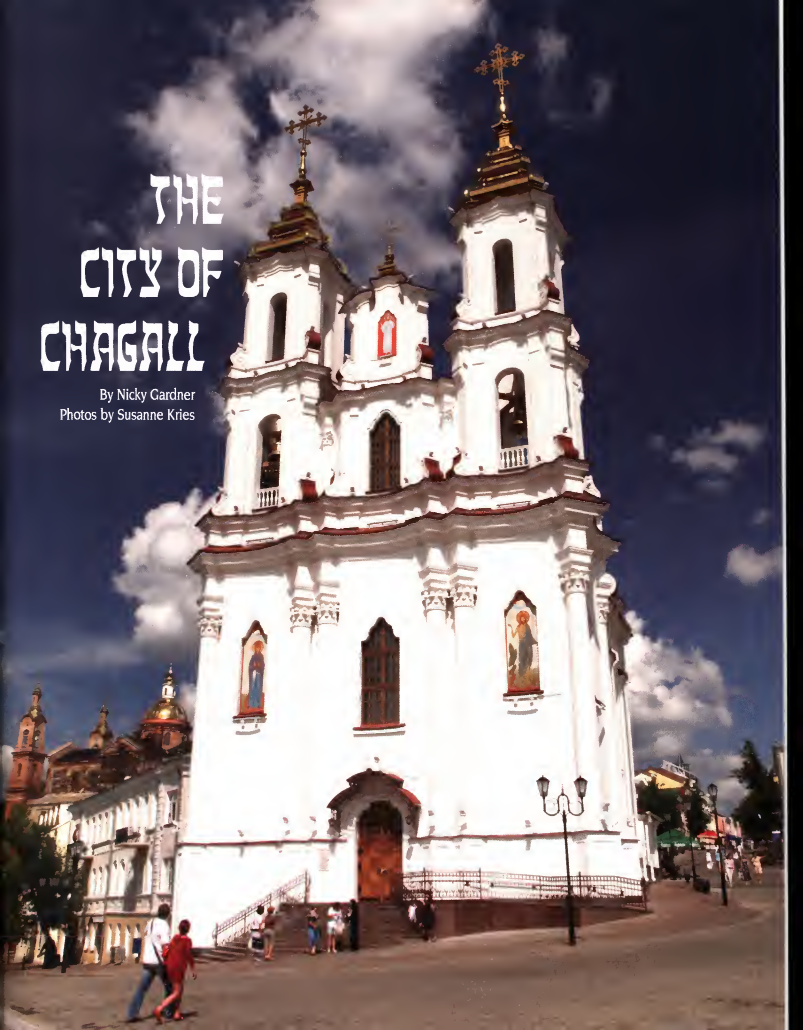
"He always used to say that real heroes were those who didn't come back from the war," Beyrle said. "I've known his story all my life, and for me it became a symbol of collaboration between our nations. Now, as an ambassador, I can say that there are more things that unite our countries than separate them. We really need to unite to fight modern common threats like terrorism and even climate change."

Among Beyrle's personal effects on display at the exhibition are: a picture of Joe Beyrle at Airborn training camp before his deployment in 1944; the War Department's unfortunate notification of Beyrle's death; telegrams notifying Joe's parents he was captured; and Beyrle's uniform and boots.

In 1994, Beyrle was awarded a special medal of honor by Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin at ceremonies held on the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Front. Beyrle died on December 12, 2004.

The exhibition, which moves to Moscow on May 6, honors Beyrle's life and highlights U.S.-Soviet cooperation during the war. It also has served as a gathering place for veterans from both countries, for students, journalists and academic experts who are exploring the development of Russian-American relationship over the past 65 years.

Anatoly Tabunshchikov, 81, a veteran of the war who attended the opening in St. Petersburg, said the exhibition "underlines the importance of the Soviet, American and British coalition, which is what enabled us to break the back of Hitler's machine." RL



THE CITY OF CHAGALL

By Nicky Gardner
Photos by Susanne Kries



"Welcome to Vitebsk," says Lydia as she greets us at the train station. The Vitebsk railroad terminal is a classic Soviet period piece – an assertive, ordered building dominated by polished marble and huge chandeliers. The station design was one of the finest efforts of Boris Sergeyevich Mezentsev, one of those railway architects who fell from favor soon after Stalin's death. Some were assigned to out-of-the-way universities to write their memoirs. Mezentsev was luckier than most. He went on to work successfully in the Uzbek Soviet Republic and in Russia's Volga region.*

Today Vitebsk station is as efficient as on the day it first opened in 1953. This is a detail that Lydia is keen to impress on us. "We do things properly here in Vitebsk," she says, going on to explain that Vitebsk is a world apart from St. Petersburg or Moscow.

From time to time a city or region becomes the nexus of a very special creative energy. A very particular creativity emerged in Vitebsk during the first quarter of the 20th century. At that time, this city 300 miles west of Moscow nurtured more artistic talent than most European capitals.

The story of how Vitebsk rose to prominence in the

Above: View from Kirov Bridge over the Western Dvina and towards the heart of the Old Town. The Church of the Dormition of Mary dominates the skyline, just as is did in some of Chagall's sketches made from the western river bank.

Previous page:
The newly refurbished and reopened 18th century Church of the Resurrection in Vitebsk. Because of its central location by the erstwhile marketplace, it is also often known as the Market Church.

* Mezentsev later coordinated the team that designed the memorial to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in the Bolshevik leader's hometown of Ulyanovsk.

arts starts not in the city itself but in Zdravneva, a small community about a dozen miles northeast of Vitebsk. It is a slip of a place that might easily have stayed forever obscure had not the Russian painter Ilya Repin purchased a riverside estate there in 1892.

Repin was one of the *Peredvizhniki* group of artists, often dubbed The Wanderers or The Itinerants by Anglo-American art critics. Repin was *the* master of Russian realism, most often remembered in the West for densely populated tableaux that powerfully evoke the colorful texture of Russian life. His *Kursk Easter Procession* and his *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to the Sultan* are among his most celebrated works. Indeed, it was the lucrative and timely sale of the latter canvas that allowed Repin to acquire the property at Zdravneva. Repin sold the picture to Alexander III in 1891 for more than R30,000, to that point the most ever paid for a Russian painting.

In Repin's day, Zdravneva was a special place. And it is just as beautiful today. There is a hint of Paradise in the gently undulating country that surrounds the Western Dvina here.* The river flows sedately past the house where the artist once lived and worked in splendid isolation. In Repin's day, it took three hours via the daily steamer to reach Vitebsk.

In winter, the snow-stifled air hangs heavy over the estate, ice and slush lingering in some years until well after Easter. But when spring comes Zdravneva bursts into color with horse chestnuts spreading their rich crowns. There are pale snowdrop anemones, a flood of yellow scorzonera and dark violets aplenty. Frogs unite in throaty chorus, water lilies flower in backwaters and midges swarm over the watery meadows and forests. The country around Zdravneva inspired some of Repin's most beloved paintings, including his realist interpretations of Russian landscapes.



The home of artist Ilya Repin at Zdravneva on the bank of the Western Dvina about 12 miles upstream of Vitebsk. Repin's studio was at the top of the tower above the house. Inset: Self portrait of the artist in 1894, about the time he purchased the property in Vitebsk.

Park landscape around Ilya Repin's home at Zdravneva. The artist's timely sale of *Reply of the Zoporozhion Cossocks to the Sulton* allowed him to purchase the property for R30,000.



Yet the legacy of Repin's years in Zdravneva was not just in his art. Repin sought to encourage local artists. He invited them to visit Zdravneva. One of the Vitebsk artists who took the steamer upriver out to Repin's home was Yehuda Pen, a charismatic teacher ten years younger than Repin. Pen was the undisputed patriarch of Vitebsk art, a man who gave his life to painting and who used the artistic vocabulary of the *Peredvizhniki* to record on canvas the faces and street scenes that colored the Vitebsk cityscape. Pen's enthusiasm for art was bound-

* Locally, Vitebsk's river is usually referred to merely as the Dvina, but the region actually has two rivers of the same name. It is therefore useful to distinguish between the Zapadnaya Dvina (Western Dvina), which flows through Vitebsk to the Baltic, and the Severnaya Dvina (Northern Dvina) which drains north into the Arctic Ocean.

less, and, with the encouragement of Repin, Pen founded a school of art in Vitebsk. It was the first private school of art anywhere in the Russian Empire.

The Wrong Side of the River

Moyshe Shagal was just five years old when Ilya Repin settled at Zdravneva. Moyshe led the simple life of most Jewish boys in Vitebsk. Although Vitebsk was far from the sea, Moyshe's father made a living from herring – salted, pickled or preserved in a dozen different ways. And Moyshe's mother ran a small shop out of the front room of the family's small red brick home on Pokrovskaya ulitsa.

"That's where he lived. Somewhere over there," says Lydia, pointing vaguely north from the station. "I'm not exactly sure where," she continues. "It's a part of town that I never visit," she explains. Moyshe evidently does not figure large on Lydia's personal radar.

Moyshe was brought up respecting the twin pillars of Jewish life in Vitebsk: trade and the Torah. The two went hand in hand on Pokrovskaya, where Shagal's family respected the Yiddish aphorism that *Toyre iz di beste skhoyre*.* Yet in truth young Moyshe had little interest in either. He lived in his own imaginative world, one fueled by images from the old Yiddish tales that every Jewish family in Vitebsk knew and loved. Moyshe dreamed of magicians wandering through mythical landscapes. And in the evenings he and other local children gathered in the courtyard behind the red brick house to hear the latest story by Sholem Aleichem, whose fabulous tales were full of characters who deftly defied the laws of physics.†

After his *bar mitzvah*, Moyshe stopped attending the local Jewish *heder* and enrolled in the Russian school on the opposite bank of the river. Vitebsk was a divided city, with the Jewish community on the west bank of the Western Dvina, around Kolbanovsky's tobacco factory. There were small workshops, synagogues and the *banya* (steam bath). Yet this was no small town *shtetl*. Vitebsk was within the Pale – that area of the Russian Empire where Jews were permitted to settle.‡ But no other city in the Pale was as close to both St. Petersburg and Moscow, and Vitebsk's Jewish community reflected that proximity in its urbane, educated and outward-looking demeanor.

Below: The old Jewish quarter on the west bank of the Western Dvina. Red brick was used for houses, workshops and factories. Inset: Marc Chagall in 1941.

Opposite, top: The 1992 monument to the artist Marc Chagall in the old Jewish quarter, close to where Chagall lived for many years.

Opposite, bottom: The house on Pokrovskaya where Marc Chagall spent his youth. Today it houses a small museum devoted to the life and work of the artist.



INSET PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS & PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION, CARL VAN VECHTEN COLLECTION

* *Toyre iz di beste skhoyre* is a Yiddish aphorism that can be translated as "the Torah is the best merchandise."

† Sholem Aleichem – *nom de plume* of Sholem Naumovich Rabinovich, the Yiddish writer who was at the height of his popularity during Marc Chagall's boyhood years in Vitebsk. Aleichim's stories and plays contributed greatly to the growing confidence of Jewish settlers in the Pale of Imperial Russia.





Getting There and Away

Most visitors to Belarus require a visa to enter the country, which must be applied for well in advance. Only citizens of select CIS nations benefit from a visa exemption. Do not be misled by the very sparse border controls on the frontier between Russia and the Republic of Belarus. A visa is still essential. Equally, if you enter Belarus from Russia and plan to return to Russia, you need a double-entry Russian visa.

Belarus is a very easy country to get around in. There are good hotels and excellent rail and bus services linking major cities. Some knowledge of Russian is a great asset.

Vitebsk is best visited during the spring or summer months. There are many spots within easy reach of Vitebsk that are deserving of a visit. Ilya Repin's former riverside estate at Zdravneva, with the artist's home and studio, is enchanting. Just 60 miles northwest of Vitebsk is the historic city of Polotsk, one of the most attractive in Belarus.

The Slavyansky Bazaar takes place in the second week of July each year. Ever since 1992, Vitebsk has hosted this annual festival of music, art and culture. It kicks off with a spectacular opening ceremony, usually attended by President Alexander Lukashenko. Presidential words of greeting evoke respectful applause and presage an evening of heavy bass, diamanté thongs, showy gymnastics and folksy dance ensembles. Over the ensuing week, performances ranging from pop to poetry attract some of the best artists from across the Slavic world.

The nearest international airport to Vitebsk is 200 miles away at Minsk. The *marshrutka* ride from Minsk to Vitebsk takes about four hours. The fastest trains, which are far more comfortable than a *marshrutka* taxi, take four hours and twenty minutes. Direct trains from St. Petersburg's Vitebsky Station and Moscow's Belorusskaya Station both take about eight hours. The city is also easy to reach from Central Europe, with direct trains to Vitebsk, not always daily, from both Prague and Berlin.

‡ The Pale of Settlement, or *cherta osedlosti*, was designated in 1791 as a prescribed settlement zone for Jews who refused to convert to Orthodox Christianity. By the late 19th century, Vitebsk was attracting a significant number of Jewish intellectuals and artists who valued the city for its proximity to Russia's principal cities – where they could visit but were prevented from settling.



Row after row of modern Vitebsk apartment blocks pushing out east towards the Pskov Highway.

Detail from a memorial on Victory Square in Vitebsk, completed in 1974, honoring those who fought in the Second World War.

Additional Reading

Aleksandra Shatskikh's impressive survey of artistic life in Vitebsk, first published in Russian in 2001, has now been translated into English. *Vitebsk: The Life of*



Art is published by Yale University Press. Shatskikh's enthusiasm for the Russian avant-garde underpins her account of Vitebsk at a transformative period in Russian and wider European history. The book focuses on artistic and cultural life in Vitebsk from 1917 to 1922.

Travelers to Belarus long bemoaned the absence of a good English language guidebook to Belarus. That changed in 2008 with the publication of an excellent guide to the country. The author of *Belarus: the Bradt Travel Guide* is Nigel Roberts, an English lawyer who has for many years been engaged in a humanitarian relief project in an area of Belarus affected by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. The book, which covers the Vitebsk region very well, is distributed in the U.S. by Globe Pequot Press.

* Marc Chagall was a man of many names. On his admission certificate to the Russian school in Vitebsk his name was entered as Мойша Захарович Шагалов (Moyshe Zakharovitch Shagalov), a Russian rendering of his Yiddish birth name. He adopted "Marc Chagall" after settling in France in 1923.

It was only in Vitebsk that a Jewish boy like Moyshe could end up attending a Russian school – and then probably only because Moyshe's mother had slipped the teacher a little incentive to admit the boy from the wrong side of the river.

Yet Moyshe Shagall's education was not just at the Russian high school. The most formative element of his education was elsewhere. Traveling on the tram across the river bridge on the way to school one day, the boy spotted an advertisement for Yehuda Pen's art college. It was a simple sign with fragile white letters set against a blue background, proclaiming "The school of drawing and painting of the artist Pen."

By the end of the week, Moyshe had attended his first tutorial with Pen. The lesson was paid for on the day. Pen charged just one ruble. It was not long before Moyshe's future career path was set. More studies in St. Petersburg, a spell in Paris, and the artist by then known as Marc Chagall was well on his way to recognition as an emerging star in the world of European art.*

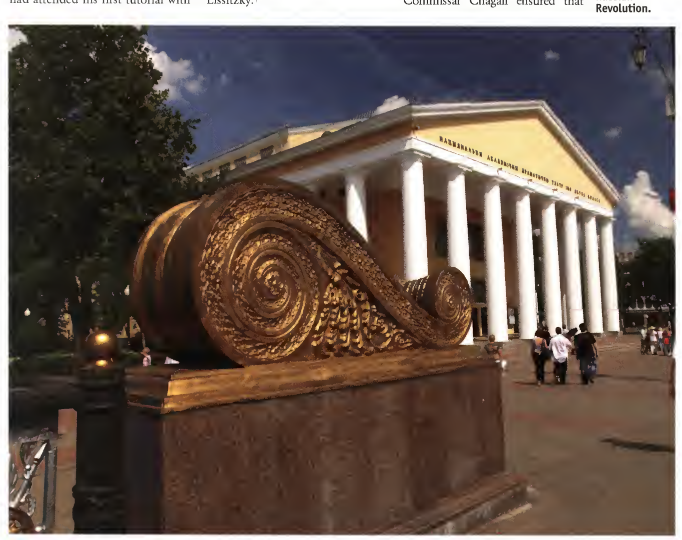
Repin, Pen and Chagall are just three of many artists associated with the city of Vitebsk and its hinterland. Pen had a remarkable capacity for spotting talent, coupled with a penetrating compassion for those who wanted to draw or paint, but who had little idea how to get started. He taught a galaxy of artists who went on to have celebrated careers, including the sculptor Ossip Zadkine and the designer and architect El Lissitzky.†

An Artist's Legacy

Chagall returned to Vitebsk after the 1917 revolution. Although just 30 years old, Chagall already had a formidable reputation. His art had been displayed in Paris and Berlin. So it was no surprise when Comrade Chagall was appointed Commissar for Arts in the Vitebsk region, a position to which the young artist initially devoted himself with considerable enthusiasm, riding the revolutionary wave of euphoria that inspired the Vitebsk artistic community in 1918.

The young commissar set about sealing Vitebsk's place on the cultural map of Russia, and in late 1918 the city celebrated the first anniversary of the revolution with much aplomb. Enlisting the help of students from Yehuda Pen's art school, Commissar Chagall ensured that

The National Drama School and Theatre. One of many Vitebsk institutions founded in the heyday of the artistic and cultural life of the city after the Russian Revolution.



† Yehuda Pen was not only an accomplished teacher, but also a very fine artist in his own right. In the main remembered for his peculiarly spiritual paintings of old men, Pen also executed a very delicate portrait of the young Marc Chagall.

Vitebsk was the best decorated city in all Russia. Imagine an entire city resplendent with giant Chagallesque scenes: serious Jewish faces, magicians, images of people and houses seemingly flying through the Vitebsk skies. Every *kommunalka* in Vitebsk vied to demonstrate its loyalty to and appreciation of the city's homegrown talent.

The celebrations for the anniversary of the revolution over, Chagall turned to his next grand project: the People's Art College. There was no art college anywhere in Russia outside Moscow and

That Chagall kept faith with Vitebsk is not in doubt. But Vitebsk did not keep faith with Chagall.

Petrograd which was empowered to grant degrees. Chagall created the first such provincial institution. As a result, the Vitebsk college attracted many of Russia's finest artists – from traditionalists to the most radical representatives of the *avant-garde*. Chagall's teacher, Yehuda Pen, naturally played a key role in the venture, serving as Vice Rector of the college.

Such an energetic initiative was bound to spawn many creative frictions, and Chagall, for all his artistic talent, was not the man to manage the college's highly charged and politicized atmosphere. He moved on to other projects, including a new museum of modern art for the city.

In 1920, he moved to Moscow and two years later left the Soviet Union, settling first in Kaunas, Lithuania, then moving to Berlin and, in 1923, to France, where he spent much of the rest of his long life.

Although Chagall never again returned to Vitebsk, he remained forever a son of the city on the Western Dvina. His art was thoroughly rooted in the Judeo-Russian tradition pioneered by Pen. Street scenes from Vitebsk, with its colorful wooden houses, churches and deeply textured faces, featured in Chagall's art for decades after he left his native city. In an article for a Jewish periodical in New York in 1944, Chagall wrote: "The best thing that I could ever wish is that you could say that I have been faithful to you."

That Chagall kept faith with Vitebsk is not in doubt. But Vitebsk did not keep faith with Chagall.

Soon after he left the Soviet Union, Chagall's name was excised from the lexicon of great Soviet artists. His work, insofar as it was referred to at all, was derided for its whimsical theatricality, its perceived childishness and its almost nostalgic preoccupation with pre-revolutionary topics. Yet the People's Art College in Vitebsk did go on to have a seminal position in the development of Soviet art. And the other institutions founded or encouraged by Chagall during his brief tenure all left their mark: theater, music and literary circles all flourished in Vitebsk during the nineteen twenties.

Modern Vitebsk

The mysterious characters who fly through Chagall's painted skies do not fly through just any skies. They are the skies of Vitebsk. Today those skies are pierced by concrete spires commemorating glorious victories, and by the spires of ancient churches. Since the war, apartment blocks have marched ever further east out of the city center, gobbling up fields along the way. Some of the wooden cottages typical of Chagall's works survived the planners' onslaught. Tram lines were continually extended to the city limits as they inched further towards the Pskov Highway.

"Our suburbs are bigger and better than those of many a Russian city," Lydia boasts.

The comparison with Russia is everywhere in Vitebsk. For the city is no longer in the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, but the Republic of Belarus. Still, Vitebsk is the most Russian of the republic's cities. Lydia's gloss on Belarusian history is unequivocal. "We stayed true to many of the old ideals," she says, pointing out the heroic poses of the soldiers at the war memorial on Victory Square.

Vitebsk has a peculiarly Soviet feel. It is a city that has not succumbed to the wave of rampant commercialism that has engulfed most of modern Russia. And, like so much of Belarus today, Vitebsk is a city that seems impressively efficient. It is a case of Swiss organization colliding with Soviet style. Of course, all is not entirely happy in the Belarusian garden, and critics are quick to point at the alleged shortcomings of the country's leader, Alexander Lukashenko, now in his third term as president of the republic.*

Lydia has no quibbles with Lukashenko or the Minsk government. She points to the orange-clad army of litter collectors making a sweep over Victory Square. "Look, the streets are kept clean here. Things work here. You could not always say the same of Russia today."

Vitebsk walks a cultural tightrope, ever proclaiming its proximity to Russia without denying its loyalty to Minsk. The town does actually have a name in Belarusian, Viciebsk, but it is not routinely used by locals. "Everyone here calls the place Vitebsk," explains Lydia. The enthusiasm for the Belarusian language, so evident in some parts of Belarus in the early 1990s, has faded. Vitebsk never shared that enthusiasm anyway, and probably quite a few in the city smiled approvingly when Lukashenko derided the language as being ill-suited to grand thoughts. Try as you might, it would be well nigh impossible to pick up a copy of the Belarusian language newspaper *Nasha Niva* anywhere in Vitebsk.†

* The non-profit think-tank Freedom House has labeled Belarus (as well as Russia and most of Central Asia) "not free," giving the country a score of 7 for political rights and 6 for civil liberties (where 1 is the best and 10 is the worst).

† *Nasha Niva* is published in Minsk by an editorial team that has done much to promote the use of the Belarusian language - not a strategy that always finds favor with the government.

Rediscovering Chagall

Yet, amid the knotty issue of language politics, there is a hint of Belarusian identity that is perceptible even in Vitebsk, close as it is to the border with Russia. And Chagall, until recently variously labeled Jewish, Russian or French by devotees of his art, is now being reconstructed as a Belarusian.

Ludmila Khmelnitskaya is the energetic director of the Chagall Museum in Vitebsk, a modest collection of mementos housed in the very building on Pokrovskaya where Chagall spent his childhood years. Khmelnitskaya is intent on recovering Chagall for Belarus.

"Yes, he was Jewish. And that led to some difficulties in Chagall being properly recognized here for many years," Khmelnitskaya says. "Art historians tend to label him as Russian or French. But here in Vitebsk, we now see Chagall as one of the most famous of all Belarusians."

The growing Chagall industry is breathing new life into Vitebsk's tourism sector. Promoting and preserving selective memories is an art form unto itself.

Khmelnitskaya distributes a prospectus for transforming the rather run down part of town that was once the city's Jewish quarter. "Look," she says. "This project is not just about Chagall. It will promote the reconstruction of almost a quarter of the historical section of Vitebsk." Minsk architect Leonid Levin is throwing his weight behind the development. Khmelnitskaya highlights a proposed zone for élite residential housing, gift shops and art studios – emphasizing that the vision is to recreate Vitebsk as it was in Chagall's day.

Lydia is skeptical that Khmelnitskaya's plan will come to fruition, recalling a dozen other ambitious projects across the city that she judges to be more deserving of public funding. But Khmelnitskaya looks not to local funding but to foreign investors who might fund an airbrushed reconstruction of Chagall's Vitebsk – a Jewish quarter that no longer has the fumes from Kolbanovsky's tobacco factory and no longer smells of herring. It would be a Jewish quarter without a working synagogue, a community no longer able to muster a *minyan*.*

On the road that runs out south out of the city center, there is a fiercely patriotic monument that overlooks the Western Dvina. "This is my favorite place in the city," says Lydia, pointing out the vast plaza dominated by huge sculptures of soldiers. There are ceremonial vistas, ponds and flowerbeds. And plenty of concrete. It is by the concrete pillars that a pair of young newlyweds poses for photographs in the hazy sunshine. Two women in bright orange overalls step forward and interrupt the photo-shoot, insisting that every piece of litter is picked up before any pictures are taken. "Look," says Lydia. "We do things properly in Belarus." RL



Three generations of Vitebsk on Pushkin Bridge, which spans the small Vitba river, a tributary which flows into the Western Dvina in the heart of Vitebsk.

* **MINYAN**: a Hebrew word meaning "to enumerate," referring to the quorum of ten males deemed necessary for communal prayer.

The Dialog Coach

By Stephen Dewar

I WAS UNEMPLOYED in Moscow when a friend called: would I like to be the dialog coach on a movie being made in St. Petersburg? Well, I had sometimes wondered what a dialog coach actually does, now was my chance to find out.

The movie *In Tranzit* (2008) is based on a true story. At the end of WWII, there was a prison camp in Leningrad for Russian women ("enemies of the state," "saboteurs," etc.), run by female NKVD guards. One day, when they were expecting a new delivery of Russian women prisoners, they instead got a delivery of male German POWs. That's the true bit. The rest of the film fictionally explores what "happened" while the German men were prisoners under the guard of Russian women.

The film is in English, with a British director, Tom Roberts, but the cast was international. The "Germans" were played by German, British and Russian actors. The "Russians" were played by American, Ukrainian, British, Dutch, Lithuanian, Irish and Russian actors and actresses. The range of accents was colossal and I was told to get the "Russians" to sound British and the "Germans" to sound, well, German.

The German Germans (Thomas Kretschmann – *The Pianist, King Kong*, etc. – and Daniel Brühl – *Goodbye Lenin*) were perfect, of course, since they were real Germans speaking good English. The difficulty was to get the non-Germans to sound just like them and then to get all the "Russians" to sound somehow different. After a few days I came up with some basic rules which I grandly described as an attempt to establish two distinct ways of speaking that would have, for the audience, "phonetic credibility," without striving for "linguistic accuracy."

I told the "Germans" to speak with an up-and-down lilt in their speech (since that was what Thomas and Daniel were doing) and the "Russians" to keep their speech flat, only allowing them to stress words of emphasis and excitement. This was not difficult for most of the "Russian" cast – apart from the Russians themselves, since Russian is a very musical language and I had to work quite hard to get them to "flatten out."

Then I moved on to how certain letters are pronounced. The "Germans" would say "v" instead of "w," "z" instead of "th," and "t" instead of "d" at the end of a word. The danger here, of course, was that someone might go overboard into self-parody and caricature: "Vee haf orders zat must be obeyt…"





Illustration: Katya Korobkina

One letter that gave us huge trouble was "r." Everybody rolled their "rs," either naturally as Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, etc., or because they thought they should, i.e. all the Brits, in order to sound "authentic." I declared war on "r."

"In this film," I ordered in my most authoritative manner as the Stalin of Pronunciation, "Only 'Germans' can – and must – roll their 'rs.' Russians will soften or swallow their 'rs.' For example, 'Germans' will call their colleague Max Borrt, while 'Russians' will call him Max Bought." And thus it came about that when the film's Big Star, John Malkovich, arrived on set, I was able to tell him – very sweetly – to try to swallow his *rs*, to which request he – equally sweetly – promised to try. I cannot claim to have gotten to know John Malkovich well, although my first exchange with him was not a conventional opening for a new acquaintance:

"Mr. Malkovich, do you think you could say 'bra-sierre' in this scene, rather than bra-zeer."

"Oh my, why certainly – I'll do my best."

He got about halfway there.

Finally, I prepared a list of words that can be pronounced correctly in English in more than one way and arbitrarily allocated one version to the "Germans" and another to the "Russians." Thus, "Russians" would say "leftenant," "komrade," "trarnsit," etc, while "Germans" would say "lootenant," "komrad," "transit"…

Armed with these ad hoc "rules," I trotted around to all the minor characters, rehearsing them before their scenes and thoroughly enjoying myself. Gradually, over the days, I noticed that, one by one, the more important actors and actresses would start asking me for my opinion until I was working with everybody except Thomas Kretschmann (apart from "How did I sound?" "You were perfect," exchanges) and the second leading lady, Ingeborga Dapkunaite, who is Lithuanian but lives with her British husband in the UK, and who needed no coaching. But the others, including the first leading lady, Vera Farmiga, a Ukrainian living in the U.S., and a Dutch actress, Thekla Reuten, who is big in Holland but hasn't done that much abroad, all asked for my advice.

All in all, it was a fascinating experience. One thing that puzzles me, though, is that there doesn't seem to be an Oscar for dialog coaches. Pity…





The Meskhetians

By Dmitry Shevchenko

Photos by Viktor Paramonov

Exactly five years ago, something happened in Russia which one might have thought impossible half a century after Joseph Stalin's passing: an entire ethnic group – one which Stalin had accused of treason and evicted from its homeland – was once again forced to change their place of residence.

Thousands of Meskhetian Turks, after surviving deportation in the 1940s and Uzbek pogroms in the 1990s, had only just become settled in Krasnodar Krai when, a few years into the 21st century, they were faced with run-of-the-mill nationalism cultivated by those in power and reinforced by Cossacks. The surge of violence prompted many Meskhetians to leave for the U.S., under a special immigration program. And while Russian media declared that the Meskhetian problem had been resolved, for many this was not the case: not qualified to emigrate, they now cannot join their families on the other side of the Atlantic.

Above: Kushali Dursunov and his wife Zulfiya Muradova have decorated the house they rent in a Turkish manner. Men and women sit separately, and most of the living room is taken up by a raised area used for sleeping, eating, and meeting guests.

IN THE RECENT PAST, the *stanitsa** of Nizhnebakanskaya was, in its own way, the "capital" of a Turkish community in Krasnodar Krai. That is, until the phobias and myths of the Stalin era were resurrected, once again turning Meskhetians into outcasts and "agents of foreign espionage."

Intercity buses normally do not stop at this small roadside settlement an hour from the Black Sea coast. So we had to leap from a moving bus. Buffeted by a penetrating wind, we stood at the *stanitsa's* bus station, waiting for a fellow with a rather exotic sounding name: Kushali Dursunov.

Fifteen minutes later, an aging Zhiguli rolled up to the station. The driver's external appearance little resembled a Janissary from the time of the Russo-Turkish War: there was no fez atop his head, nor did he sport a mustache. Dark haired and stocky, Dursunov more resembled a denizen of Central Asia, newly arrived in Russia and looking for work.

As we wove our way down the paved highway at a respectable clip, Dursunov kept his cellphone pinned to his ear, carrying on simultaneous conversations with the *stanitsa's* ambulance service and with his wife. "Well, where the hell are they?!" he yells into his phone, in Russian. "Mama's blood pressure spiked last night," he explained apologetically. "Do you know what that means for someone who is 90? We called the ambulance this morning, but they still haven't come. I just called for the fifth time, they said to just wait."

Dursunov is 100 percent Meskhetian Turk, one of the few that remained in Krasnodar Krai after the mass exodus of Meskhetians to the U.S. And his 90-year-old father has become something of a local legend. Barely had he attained American citizenship when he gave up everything and returned to Russia, where he had absolutely nothing.

The historic region of Meskhetia is in present-day northeast Turkey and southern Georgia, in the area known as Samtskhe-Javakheti (which is part of the mountainous region known as Moschia). Meskhetians at one time also occupied the eastern region of Adjara, a Georgian province to the west, along the Black Sea. There is, however, no universal opinion on the origins of the Meskhetians; some say they are descendants of ethnic Turks and Georgians of the Meskhi tribe,† others that they are descendants of Georgian-Meskhi who were Turkefied during the time of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922), with an admixture of ethnic Turks and Azerbaijanis.

Meskhetian Turks don't speak "classic" Turkish, but one of its eastern dialects that is very similar to Azeri and completely unlike modern Georgian. (The Meskhetians call their language Ahıska Türkçäsi.)

Up until the beginning of the 20th century, Meskhetian Turks living in what was then the Russian Empire were not forbidden from calling themselves Turks or from practicing Islam (most are Sunni Muslim). But everything changed when the Bolsheviks came to power. In 1928, Georgian authorities required Meskhetians to adopt Georgian surnames. At the time of the onset of the Stalinist repression, "Georgification" had become so ramped up that the Meskhetian Turkish ethnic group officially ceased to exist: there were just isolated families who had previously ranked themselves among the Turks.

Stalin is often said to be the source of the aphorism: "No person, no problem." In fact it was his guiding principle, since the biggest problem for the Father of All Nations (one of the many appellations given Stalin in the 1930s and 1940s) was the *nations* themselves. Meskhetian Turks, despite vigorous attempts to turn them into Georgians, fell beneath the same millstone as hundreds of thousands of people of other nationalities, from Crimean Tatars to Chechens and Kalmyks. After Fascist Germany attacked the Soviet Union, they all – irrespective of age, gender, professional qualifications or service to Soviet power – were packed up and sent thousands of miles away, accused of being "unreliable." It always happened the same way. A village or town in the Crimea or Caucasus was surrounded by NKVD troops, and the Chekists went from house to house, herding men, women and children out of their homes, like cattle. Then they were shipped to Kazakhstan and the rest of Central Asia in cold, wooden train cars, with little but the clothes on their back.

Surprisingly, the Meskhetian Turks were able to cling to their historical homeland almost to the end of the war, until November 15, 1944, when 120,000 of them were forcibly deported over two weeks. Prior to this, practically all male Meskhetians of draft age had gone to the front, to fight the Germans. Thus, to suspect their families of sympathy for Hitler or Nazism was absurd...

The real reason for the deportation became known only after the fall of the Soviet Union, when documents of the State Committee for Defense of the USSR were declassified – in particular, Decree No. 6279 of 31 July 1944. This is how it explained why an entire people needed to be deported: "In connection with the fact that a significant portion of the population was related to residents of border regions of Turkey, these family relationships have evoked emigratory inclinations, charges of complicity with the enemy, contraband activities and have made them recruits for Turkish espionage and bandit groups..."

"WE'RE HERE," KUSHALI DECLARED. The car was brought to a halt next to a wooden fence covered by grapevines. Behind it was a low house of brick and clay, a tiny yard, and a similarly tiny garden. In general, a typical home for this Cossack region. It had been in this condition even before Kushali and his wife Zulfia rented it.

* **STANITSA:** a large Cossack village.

† The Meskhi or Moschi were indigenous people of this region of Georgia since before the modern era.

Immediately upon stepping through the door, we stepped into another time and place. In the middle of the singular room – which served simultaneously as a bedroom, living room and kitchen – was a large *topchan** covered with a colorful rug. On the walls were canvases with quotes from the Koran. Typically, a *topchan* is divided into "male" and "female" sections; in keeping with Islamic tradition, if men and women are in the same space, they should be separated.

But not today. The aged mother of our hero was sick and she was being fussed over by Kushali's wife, Zulfia, his father Kamal, and a female friend of the family. Kamal is the previously noted local celebrity. Neighbors call him "the American" to his face, and local bureaucrats tremble at the sight of the 88-year-old elder sporting a Turkish fez, his threadbare jacket hung with military medals.

"He doesn't have his own home, so he makes himself at home with my mother, with me and Zulfia, in this little detached hut. He is constantly going from office to office, requesting that he, as a veteran, be given an apartment, and they want nothing more to do with him in the administrative offices," Kushali explained.

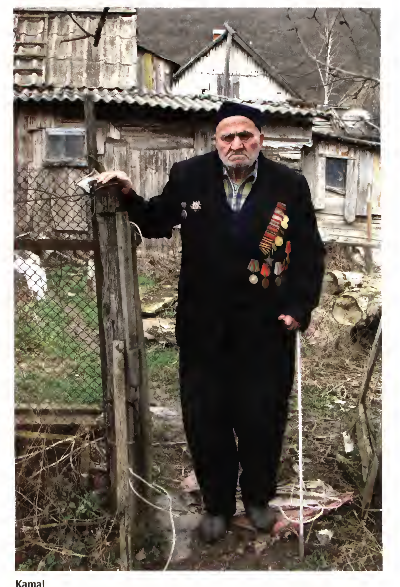
Kamal is not able to easily express himself in Russian. He discloses his age and the ghastly wounds he suffered in the war. Even through his jacket and vest you can see the cavity where they cut out the bits of shrapnel that tore into him.

"Was in Leningrad, in Baltics, in Germany," Kamal said in broken Russian, ticking off on his fingers the stops on his front line tour.

In 1941, as a 17-year-old, he was drafted into the Red Army, and almost immediately sent to the Soviet-German front. Over the next four years, Kamal Dursunov walked several thousand kilometers through the Soviet Union and Europe, to the very heart of Berlin.

News never reached the young soldier that his family, along with thousands of other Turkish families accused of "emigratory inclinations," had been shipped off to Central Asia. By the end of the war Kamal, a specialist in anti-tank defenses, had managed to distinguish himself. He had destroyed two German Tiger tanks, received several serious wounds and was celebrated for having, in a hand-to-hand combat, put his fist through the metal helmet of a German soldier.

Nonetheless, he fell under suspicion of sympathy for Hitler's troops. "There was this case in Germany," Kamal recalled. "I was walking along and saw a German in a British coat, clearly on the run. I pointed my gun at him and he cried, 'Don't shoot, I have children!' And I didn't want to kill him. The orders were: take Germans prisoner. I took him to our guys, and the lieutenant was all over me, 'Why'd you bring this fascist here, why didn't you shoot him?' He said to me, 'This is how you do it.' He took out his pistol, put it to the German's head and pulled the trigger…"



Kamal Dursunov ("The American") at the entrance to the family's rented house. He knew he had nothing left in Russia, but still decided to come back after two years in the U.S.

Kamal then heatedly declared to the butcher-lieutenant that, yes, you have to kill at the front, but not at army headquarters. And he paid for it. Instead of being sent home for treatment when he was next wounded, his commander ordered him to take part in the storming of Berlin.

Kamal met his future wife, Shakhria, after the war, in Central Asia. They have been married 63 years. Five of their sons, two daughters, and countless grandchildren and great grandchildren have disbursed across the globe, from Turkey to the U.S. And now it's been three hours since the onset of Shakhria's high blood pressure attack, and still no ambulance. So Kamal and his son Kushali, in order to relieve some of the tension, lead us on an excursion about their yard.

"Just don't help him, don't give him your arm," Kushali said. "Let him walk on his own; he needs to keep moving."

* **TOPCHAN**: a cross between a large bed and a low couch.

The yard creates a depressing impression. Behind a half-collapsed wooden shed is a tiny garden piled high with dried up branches and trash. You could film a horror movie here. In fact, the entirety of the Dursunov family's life is a horror film: no permanent work, and the only regular source of income is the parents' pension. And that is barely enough to rent this ramshackle little house without any modern conveniences.

There is no running water in Nizhnebakanskaya *stanitsa*, and the residents have to obtain water on their own. Those who have means drill wells; those who are less well off must use common wells. Until recently, Kushali hauled water from one such well, but this winter it was destroyed when the river overflowed its banks. Now he has to pay for water from his neighbor.

Despite these day-to-day struggles, when Kushali's brothers left Krasnodar Krai five years ago for the U.S., along with thousands of their kinsmen, it was not such struggles they were trying to escape. But Kushali refuses to talk about what it was that led thousands of Meskhetian Turkish families to pick up and leave for another country, as if it were the time of the Stalinist deportations. "Politics," is what he calls it. "And I don't mess around in politics; I have to live here," he said.

KHALIMA BADALOVA, a friend of the family who lives in the neighboring settlement of Novoukrainskoye, also has no love for politics, but she is much more willing to recall the events which forced her to come to the Kuban. Khalima's family lived in Uzbekistan, where her parents had been sent after Stalin's deportations. In May and June 1989, Uzbek pogroms suddenly gripped the Fergana Valley. There was chaos in Khalima's hometown of Pskent. Uzbek nationalists attacked the homes of Meskhetian Turks. She and her husband, along with her mother-in-law and their three children, were saved from the impending massacre by hiding in the home of their neighbor, the head of the local militia.

"They hid us in the back room," she recalled, "and all night long we heard someone tossing stones onto the roof and calling out, 'We know you have Turks in there!'"

To this day, it is not clear what brought on these events, which have come down in history as the "Fergana massacre" and the "Tashkent massacre" (some are of the opinion that the nationalists simply took advantage of Uzbeks' dissatisfaction in their poverty and lack of rights). But the facts remain: barely had Gorbachev's reforms begun, when the Meskhetian Turks, who lived for many decades in Central Asia, suddenly became outcasts. Some 90 thousand Meskhetians were forced to flee Uzbekistan in fear for their lives.

"Allah is my witness, we have never feuded with anyone. My entire childhood I lived alongside Uzbeks," Khalima said. "Went to school with them, then worked, celebrated with them, visited in each other's homes." Then, as if to illustrate her story, she placed on the table a large plate of authentic Uzbek *plov*, which she had prepared in front of us. "How do they put it in Asia? If I die, then let it at least be after the *plov*," she laughed.

Table customs are tell-tale proof that the Meskhetian Turks assimilated many traditions from the locals during their Central Asian exile. Today, for instance, a guest in a Turkish home can seriously offend his host if he refuses to consume several portions of *plov*, to drink the required green tea, or to sample the thick soup, the main ingredient of which is something akin to *pelmeni*.

In Khalima's family photo album, there is a gap in the chronology: there are black and white photos of Khalima and her former husband, taken in the Soviet Union, and then there are the very recent color photos of some sort of park with rides, a beautiful young woman and a fun-loving little boy.

"This is my daughter, Asya, and my grandson. They are in New York state now," Khalima says in a far from happy voice. "When the Uzbeks attacked our home in Pskent, my daughter was very young… I feared for her most of all. I thought: 'I will give up everything, run away anywhere at all, if only the children can be saved.' In the store where I worked back then, I had a good boss. He paid me my back wages and even gave me some food for the journey. We took off, not knowing where we were headed. The only information I had was that, after the massacres, some Turks had gone to Russia, to the Kuban. So I thought, 'Let's just get on a train and go in search of our people.'"

AFTER THE NATIONALIST UPRISING in Central Asia, the Soviet government was seriously bewildered by the mass exodus of Meskhetians. For the late Soviet Era, such an en masse, uncontrolled migration of citizens was something completely new and strange. For that reason the leaders were frightened, and they sought to somehow control the migration process.

The government decided that refugees from Central Asia would be allowed to settle only in Russia's central regions, in Orlov, Voronezh and Kursk oblasts. They supposed that the Turks would only settle in Russia temporarily, while the groundwork was laid for their repatriation to their historical homeland, in Georgia. Of course the government's decision was poorly executed; no one thoroughly monitored where the refugees actually went and where they settled.

The first Meskhetian Turk families arrived in Krasnodar Krai after the pogroms in Fergana. Soon others were drawn here as well – people who had tried unsuccessfully to settle in other Russian regions. "We really can't live without land, without our farms," Khalima explained. "We've tilled the land for several

The famous Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli is reputed to have come from Meskhetia.

generations. And the Kuban had the best conditions for farming, better than anywhere else in Russia. Lots of our people were immediately drawn here and they were our relatives, our acquaintances. The 'Sarafan Radio' network sprang into action."

As Khalima remembers it, at that time most of the population of Krasnodar Krai was very poor. As in all other parts of the former USSR, there were grave shortages of foodstuffs, which could only be purchased with ration coupons distributed at one's place of employment. And it was especially difficult to find work, particularly in such a rural location, so many emigres began to work for themselves, doing backyard farming, raising vegetables, greens and potatoes for sale at local farmer's markets. And, insofar as (according to definitions which existed at that time) they did not have any official workplace, they could not get foodstuff coupons.

When the emigres nonetheless asked the local authorities to give them coupons for sugar, butter and soap, it caused friction with the Russian-speaking population, who were dissatisfied that the immigrants (who in their eyes were living on "non-labor income") wanted what they themselves desperately needed. It was almost an exact repeat of the situation at the beginning of the pogroms in Uzbekistan, where local nationalists, playing on the local population's emotions, blamed people of a different nationality for all their problems: "while we were bent over in the cotton plantations, the Turks were trading in the bazaars."

But, in contrast to Uzbekistan, the Kuban administration did not at all try to extinguish the source of hatred toward the migrants. Lots of refugees, from all corners of the expiring Soviet Union, were descending on Krasnodar Krai at that time, and the battle with "uninvited guests" became the favorite hobby horse of regional politicians.

"This is explained by the fact that local administrations could hang any of their failures on the migrants," said Victor Gaskevich, a board member of the Krasnodar division of the human rights organization Memorial. "They could be blamed for the increases in poverty, unemployment, crime. It reached absurd levels: in several regions, the local leaders blamed the Turks for the fact that, since they had started trading their greens and vegetables at the markets, prices for these items fell, causing local peasants to suffer."

Memorial has been monitoring the conflict between Meskhetian Turks and the Kuban administration since the beginning of the 1990s. The entire time, the organization has sought to have the Russian and Georgian governments revive their original plan to return the Meskhetian Turks to their historic homeland. In the mid-1990s, Georgia submitted an application for entry to the Council of Europe, the main demand from whom was the speedy repatriation to Georgia of peoples deported by Stalin.

"But the issue died after Georgia was admitted to the Council of Europe," Gaskevich said. "On the other hand, the administration of Krasnodar Krai had no intention of waiting. Their logic was simple: since the Meskhetians are leaving soon, everything should be done to make it happen as quickly as possible. First of all they complicated the procedure for legalizing refugees and strengthened passport controls. In order to legally reside in Russia, every six months the Meskhetians had to obtain a certificate on temporary residency. But such documents were provided only upon presentation of a receipt proving one had paid taxes, plus a whole packet of medical and other certificates. The passport-visa service did not demand anything like this from any other foreign nationality."



Kushali Dursunov's parents, photographed in Central Asia in the 1950s.

KHALIMA BADALOVA FEELS in her bones what it means to live in Russia as an "illegal." In the first few years after she arrived in Krasnodar Krai, she used her old Soviet passport and, like many of her compatriots, sought a certificate of temporary residency. "I simply had to live here legally," she said. "After all, I was traveling to the city to work, and constantly had to deal with the police." Yet soon Khalima was condemned to several years of unemployment when she lost her papers.

"Did you not leave the house out of fear of the police?" I asked.

"What do you mean, police!" she replied. "They were not what was scary; scary was when the Cossacks started going house to house. This is what would happen: early in the morning, two or three people in Cossack uniforms – often drunk – kicked on our doors, in general acting rude and demanding that we show them our passports. Once, several Cossacks went to the home of my distant relative. They saw his son in the yard, squatting down and working on something. One Cossack goes up to him and yells, "Stand up!" The boy talked back somehow, and the Cossack smacked him across the face as hard as he could. The father came running out when he heard the cry… Luckily, some



Teary-eyed Khalima Badayeva showing photographs of her children and grand-children, who now live in the United States.

neighbor called the police: a horrible fight started and they would have killed each other. The Cossacks didn't stop fighting until the police arrived. But none of them were punished."

There were plenty of similar situations in villages where the Meskhetian Turks settled. One story became something of a local parable: during one of the Cossack's raids to uncover "illegal immigrants" in a village not far from Anapa, the Cossacks, armed with rubber whips, rubber truncheons and gas pistols, broke into a private homeowner's yard and, upon seeing a clay stove for baking *lepeshki*,* declared to the homeowner, "We need to set you on fire right here, douse you in gasoline and set you on fire…"

The fascinating thing about this situation is that the Cossacks had no legal authority to check documents. In Russia, only the police has such authority. But the police did nothing to hinder the Cossacks in their raids. And why did the Cossacks themselves need this? How were they bothered by this tiny diaspora of Meskhetian Turks? And who issued an order to the Cossacks to break the law, to stand in for the officials that are supposed to safeguard our rights?

Vladimir Gromov, the former leader of the Kuban Cossacks, declined to answer any questions of this sort. Gromov is the person many Meskhetian Turks point to as the ideological inspiration for "anti-immigration raids." "This issue is far from something I worry about," he said. "As far as I know, there is no longer any conflict."

Polina Potsebneva, press secretary for the Kuban Cossack Troops said she was rather interested to know, "who will benefit from this publication," and declared that the present leadership of the regional Cossack organization "does not feel it has a right to discuss the actions of its predecessors."

When you put these questions to ordinary Cossacks in Nizhnebakanskaya *stanitsa*, they, on condition of anonymity, admit that they never had anything against Meskhetian Turks. They also admit that, yes, the "raids" went overboard, but back then, they say, the governor spoke rather often about battling against illegal immigration, and the Cossacks could not remain on the sidelines.

It is certainly true that ten years ago everyone and their brother in Krasnodar Krai was talking about the evils of immigration, which were personified in the Meskhetian Turks. And the local media constantly quoted Governor Alexander Tkachev, who promised to organize charter flights to send the Meskhetians back to Uzbekistan, who called on the Cossack citizens' brigades to "activate" and conduct passport checks "not just every day, but every night as well."

* **LEPESHKI:** round breads typical of Central Asia.



Nizhnebakanskaya *stanitsa* is considered the unofficial "capital" of Meskhetian turks in the Krasnodar region. It is also a typical rural, southern Russian settlement.

The anti-Turk hysteria even overflowed onto national television. One station aired a report, clearly intended for "sensational" effect, which alleged the Meskhetian Turks had moved to Krasnodar Krai on the orders... of Turkey's intelligence services, which were interested in increasing their influence in southern Russia. How is it possible *not* to be reminded of the justification given for Stalin's 1944 deportation of Meskhetians?

The family of Sakhid Mailov, a resident of Nizhnebakanskaya *stanitsa*, did not escape the attention of television reporters seeking sensationalism. "I was constantly surprised that this one journalist kept asking kids to make faces, and then the cameraman would take their picture." Sakhid said. "Then I watched the report and learned that we Turks are very aggressive, that even our children have evil faces."

THE PEAK OF THE CONFRONTATION between Meskhetians and local authorities came in 2002, immediately after a new regional law on immigration was passed in Krasnodar Krai. The law made it possible to detain illegal immigrants in special centers, until the issue of their forcible eviction was resolved. At that time, some 15,000 Meskhetian Turks lived in Krasnodar Krai, and of those, according to official data, no more than 4,000 held Russian citizenship. The remainder were under threat of the governor's "charter flights."

In protest, some 200 Meskhetians declared a hunger strike, demanding that they be immediately granted Russian citizenship. They did not achieve their goals, but they did attract the attention of international human rights organizations and the Directorate for the UN High Commission on Refugees.

A representative of Amnesty International turned to the U.S. Department of State and asked that it consider granting refugee status to those of the Meskhetians who wanted it. A commission comprised of representatives from the OSCE, the UN, the Council of Europe and the U.S. visited Krasnodar Krai. As a result, the U.S. State Department gave its approval to a resettlement plan for Turkish communities in 2004 and 2005. The International Organization on Migration (IOM) headed up the effort.

"We immediately went to IOM," said Mailov. "Not everyone was able to go to the States, only those who could prove that they had lived for an extended period in Krasnodar Krai. For this, one had to either have Russian citizenship or no citizenship at all. And many in our region had Uzbek passports. I myself had to go to Uzbekistan to get a local passport, so that I could live legally in Russia. So I was not eligible for this program."

But Mailov's 26-year-old daughter Adelya successfully navigated the interview and flew to Indiana.

His brother and family also headed to the other side of the ocean. More dramatic events occurred in Khalima Badalova's family. As she was wracking her brains trying to figure out how to get her lost Soviet passport reissued, her children and grandchildren all flew off to the States, leaving their mother and grandmother completely alone.

Then there is the orphan of Nizhnebakanskaya, Rashid. His entire family left for America, including his wife's parents. He was reportedly left behind due to some problem with his documents.

As soon as the refugee quota set by the U.S. State Department was filled, the immigration program was shut down, and the Meskhetians who remained in Krasnodar Krai (from one to three thousand, by different estimates) could only hope to be reunited with their relatives through private means.

Among those left behind there circulate rumors that they didn't get through the IOM program because lots of Meskhetian Turks from the regions of Voronezh, Rostov and Astrakhan got through, even though the program was specifically for the evacuation of Meskhetians living in Krasnodar (due to the fact that there was not a single serious case of ethnic violence against Meskhetians in any other region). Allegedly, Meskhetians from "better" regions succeeded in bribing Krasnodar bureaucrats to receive certificates stating that they had lived for a long time in the Kuban. Of course, there is no proof that any such machinations took place.

After the mass exodus of Meskhetians to the U.S., the Krasnodar administration unexpectedly softened in their treatment of those left behind. All were given Russian passports; the Cossack raids and xenophobic press hysteria faded into the past. When asked if they would like to leave for the U.S., to be with their relatives, many reply that they would prefer it if their relatives returned to Russia.

"I don't even know whether I would want to go there," confessed vegetable farmer Nuffadin Mursalimov. "On the one hand, my whole family is in America; on the other hand, no one is bothering us here. Ask my children if anyone in their school insults them for being Turks. They will say no."

Nuffadin's son and daughter are in primary school and speak very good Russian, giving the impression that they could give their heavily accented father some Russian lessons. Yet ten years ago accusations flew that the children of Meskhetian Turks could not study in Russian schools because they did not know the language.

Mursalimov's wife shows off her miniature farm: two cows, which they keep in the backyard, and a small garden. Of course, the children help with the farming. In the winter, the Mursalimovs take their "vacation," since they only have to look after their cows. But in the spring Mursalimov's wife goes to the local administration to re-request the rental of their land plot, in order to plant vegetables and greens for sale.

The Mursalimovs were truly surprised by Kushali Dursunov's father, Kamal. The old man could have lived out his days in calm and comfort in the States, yet he up and returned. Kushali's parents and three of his brothers moved to Idaho. But his father had lived in the U.S. for barely two years when he asked his sons to put together the money for his return ticket to Russia. "America is alright," he said, offering a typically sparing summary of his life as a political immigrant. "But I couldn't get the language."

Kamal and Shakhria returned, one might say, to subsist on ashes. Their only remaining son in Russia, Kushali, did not have a home or stable work. But they had nowhere else to go. For two years now, Kamal has been darkening the doorways of local administrators and veterans organizations, demanding that they provide him the entitlements promised all veterans – most importantly a place to live.

Recently, Kamal even wrote a letter to President Medvedev, in which he reminded him of "the responsibility of the state to guarantee veterans' social securities, as stipulated in the Constitution." The president has so far not replied, and the old warrior continues to joust with the windmills of the Russian bureaucracy, which, it turns out, are more tenacious than a German Tiger tank. **RL**

Coming to America

When the 11,250 Meskhetian-Turks emigrated to the United States, they were disbursed to communities throughout the country. In 2005-2006, over 100 were resettled in central Vermont, in communities surrounding the state capital of Montpelier, where Russian Life has its publishing offices.

Gulzada Shaibov was a teenager when her family resettled to Barre, Vermont. In 2008 she graduated from Spaulding High School and soon married Raim Kachaliyev, whose family (including his parents and brothers) had also resettled here. By all appearances just two families have stayed in Central Vermont.

"Almost all the families have moved away, to other states" Gulzada said. "Some have moved because of jobs, some because it is just too expensive to buy a house in Vermont, so they moved to places like Michigan, where it is cheaper."

Jobs are also hard to come by in Vermont's economy, but then they are hard to come by for native-born Americans as well. Still, Gulzada and her family have been able to find some part-time work. She trained in cosmetology but works a couple of days a week in a Price Chopper grocery store. Other family members work at a Montpelier hotel. "My father-in-law can't find a job," Gulzada said, shushing her crying baby. "He's not that old or anything, but without English, it's kind of hard."

Does the family get nostalgic for Russia or Uzbekistan during the cold Vermont winters? "A bit," Gulzada admits, saying her mother traveled this winter to visit Gulzada's sister and uncles, who still live in Krasnodar Krai.

"But it's only good to visit for a few weeks," Gulzada continued, "not to go back to live there. It's much harder to live there than it was a few years ago."



Girl With a Birch Bark Container, by Alexei Venetsianov (1824)

Organic Containers

ALEXEI VENETSIANOV'S *Girl With a Birch Bark Container* (1824) is not simply a beautiful portrait. It is a personification of Russian ideals. The girl represents all that is noble and strong in Russian peasant culture. Well before Tolstoy lauded the peasants in such works as "Master and Man," Venetsianov was already capturing their simplicity and strength.

His decision to depict the peasantry was radical for its time. Venetsianov was the first painter to portray scenes of peasant life instead of making classical portraits, as espoused by the Russian Academy of Arts. Perhaps because he was self-taught and therefore less susceptible to academic restrictions, he painted from nature instead of copying models, and sought in his work to convey the harmony of rural Russian life and the peasants' connection to the land. He even established a school for talented serfs and other poor artists in the village of Safonkovo, in Tver Province. In addition to teaching painting, Venetsianov fought for the freedom of his serf pupils. Sadly, despite his considerable efforts, the cruel landowner N.P. Miliukov refused to

Birch bark containers were indispensable in the Russian kitchen. They were made from readily available material, and the bark also has strong antibacterial qualities.

free the talented serf painter, Grigory Soroka, who eventually committed suicide.

Venetsianov's paintings depict an idealized world. In this portrait, the peasant girl's link to nature is expressed by the trees in the background; a more realistic depiction would have placed her at work in the kitchen. The dark, brooding backdrop hints at Romanticism, and yet the girl is suffused with light, her gaze direct. There is no question that she is Russian: the bright red of her scarf and the container of birch bark symbolize Russian beauty and the land.

Birch bark containers were indispensable in the Russian kitchen. For one thing, they were made from a natural and readily available material. Birch bark was particularly well suited for storage containers of all kinds, since it is watertight (think of birch bark canoes). The bark also has strong antibacterial properties, making it excellent for storing such products as honey, sour cream, milk, grain, flour, berries, and lard. All of these foodstuffs could be kept for a long time without spoiling. Other containers were designed as utensils, such as the one in this painting, which the girl uses for mixing.

Making birch bark kitchenware was a laborious process. The bark was removed from the trees after the sap had stopped running in late spring. Only trees that had recently fallen, or that were to be used for construction, were stripped. Given the birch tree's significance in Russian culture, it was considered wrong to kill a living tree. The bark was removed from the tree with a knife, with every effort made to keep it as intact as possible. It was soaked in water for several hours to turn pliable, then placed under a heavy weight to dry. The coloration and imperfections of the bark were considered part of its decorative beauty. For vessels like the one pictured here, the bark was turned inside out to reveal its golden interior. Here, too, you can see a protective rim made of splints to make the utensil more durable.

The Russians believe birch bark contains more than antibacterial properties. It is said to relieve stress and exhaustion; merely touching it has a calming effect. It is hard to imagine that the peasant girl in this picture is not overworked – she is, after all, a serf. But it is nice to think that this beautiful vessel will help ease her chores.

IGOR SHPYRTSYN (DREAMSTIME.COM)

Homemade Sour Cream



Commercial American sour cream doesn't have the luxuriant texture of real Russian *smetana*, which is loose enough to pour. The American product is so stiff that it clumps instead of dissolving when added to hot soups. It's very easy to make your own sour cream at home, and you'll be amazed at how good it tastes—even if you don't store it in a birch bark container.

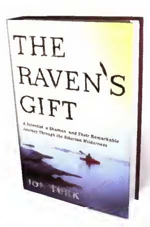
4 cups heavy cream (preferably not ultra-pasteurized)
2 tablespoons buttermilk

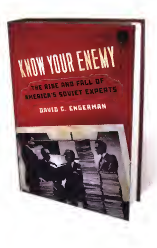
Stir the buttermilk into the cream and let stand in a warm place for 24 hours. Stir to blend, then refrigerate.

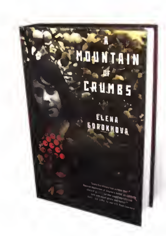
Makes about 1 pound.

Adapted from *A Taste of Russia*

by paul e. richardson







THE RAVEN'S GIFT

Jon Turk
St. Martin's Press ($27.99)

Jon Turk is a scientist and adventurer who has, among many accomplishments, paddled the length of Kamchatka (recounted in a Mar/Apr 2001 Russian Life article by his late wife, Christine Seashore) and the Pacific Rim. Jon Turk is also a gifted writer and storyteller.

Turk the scientist was not inclined to mysticism. But it was thrust upon him when a series of "chance" events near Vvenka (where Kamchatka Peninsula meets the mainland) led him to be miraculously and inexplicably (in the rational world of modern science) healed by a Siberian shaman, Moolynaut.

Turk recounts his journey through nearly a decade of life, centering on repeated visits to Moolynaut, exploring the lines between this world and the next, between modern culture and Koryak culture, between himself and the world around him. As one Russian friend tells him:

"You are a poor traveler in the Other World… You must make a long, hard journey… in the Real World. You will be hungry and tired. Then maybe, if you are lucky, you will find what you are looking for."

It is well worth joining Turk on his journey to find what he is looking for. He is uncannily observant and perceptive, self-effacing, sensitive, and quite often very funny.

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KNOW YOUR ENEMY

THE RISE AND FALL OF AMERICA'S RUSSIA EXPERTS

David. C. Engerman
Oxford, $34.95

It is astounding to realize how few Russian experts (barely beyond single digits) there were in the United States before the 1917 revolution and even before World War II. Indeed, in 1948, when the war with Hitler was won and the Cold War just begun, the U.S. government only had about a dozen Russian speakers in its employ.

What followed was an explosion of government funding for academic programs and institutes around the country, the development of Soviet Studies and Kremlinology, and a strenuous effort to "know thine enemy."

Engerman shows that this effort forged a unique relationship between government and academia. It was a relationship not limited to the hard or social sciences, as it bled over into literature, creating a web of interaction between spies, academics, generals and politicians that somehow linked Pushkin to the Pentagon, yet mostly failed to predict, half a century later, the sudden collapse of the organism under study.

Deeply researched, well-written, this is an important chronicle that explains much about how government and academia still interact, and it should be read not just by Russophiles, but by anyone interested in new academic initiatives to focus on "Islamic Studies."

A MOUNTAIN OF CRUMBS

Elena Gorokhova
Simon and Schuster, $26

A memoir must tread a fine line between getting personal enough to strike a chord in the reader, but not so intimate that the reader becomes bored by details only of interest to the writer and her family. Gorokhova skillfully traverses this line with grace, candor, and an engrossing narrative.

With a gift of memory that allows her to conjure up an astonishing depth of detail, Gorokhova delivers an intimate view of half a century of life in the Soviet system, eerily complete in its horrid squalor,

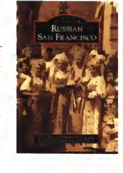
parasitic fear, and profoundly deep human friendships.

Gorokhova leads the reader through her family's history, beginning with her mother's early sparrings with the Stalinist system and culminating with her own emigration from the Soviet Union in 1980 as a erstwhile bride of an American academic. Along the way we meet a profusion of characters so richly-drawn as to seem almost personally familiar to a frequent visitor to Russia.

In short, *A Mountain of Crumbs* is a fine memoir that reads like fiction but is all the more powerful because it is not.

RUSSIAN SAN FRANCISCO

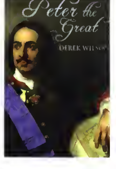
Lydia Zaverukha and Nina Bogdan
Arcadia, $21.99



A pictorial biography of America's oldest metropolitan Russian enclave, from the establishment of Fort Ross to the founding of numerous social clubs and societies. This is a nice chronicle of an active expatriate community seeking, against all odds, to retain its culture, language and history.

PETER THE GREAT

Derek Wilson
St. Martin's, $29.99



If the longer biographies of Peter (by Peter Massie and Lindsay Hughes) are not for you, or if you just want to visit Peter's history anew, you can't go wrong with this tightly and beautifully written biography of Peter Alexeyevich. Derek Wilson is not a Russian expert, but a historian, a biographer, and a fine writer. And he ably packs a very full life into just 202 pages.

READER LETTERS

(continued from page 5)

that this fact alone is misleading without mentioning that in 2009 there was a record-breaking fishing season [путина] that almost doubled the catch of 2008. This is due to the fact that last year was one of the most favorable spawning seasons for salmon.

Alina Gridley
via email

To the Editors:

I am an American citizen who is married to a Russian wife and has traveled to Russia six times in the past seven years.

I'd like to comment on the disparity in entrance fees to the Hermitage. The 400 rubles that a foreigner would pay to get into the Hermitage seems to me to be fair.

> "The 400 rubles that a foreigner would pay to get into the Hermitage seems to me to be fair."

For a U.S. citizen, 400 rubles is approximately $13-15, depending on the exchange rate. Most of our U.S. museums would probably charge a similar rate to everyone who visited them, or at least ask for a "suggested donation" of at least 10 dollars.

So for a U.S. citizen who has probably paid at least $800 dollars for the plane ticket, and might be spending $150 or more a night on a hotel, spending $13-15 is nothing to access a world class museum such as the Hermitage.

If Russia were to sharply raise that rate beyond what would be comparable for a U.S. museum to charge, then I would agree that is unfair.

Finally, knowing a little about Russian salaries and income, I can say that it is a good thing the "Russian" price for the Hermitage is 100 rubles, otherwise many ordinary Russian families would not be able to afford going there, if the charge were 400 rubles.

Thanks, and keep the good articles coming!

Mark Conway
by email

To the Editors:

I quite appreciated your article on Kaliningrad/Königsberg, but missed one aspect of its history: the puzzle derived from the seven bridges of Königsberg: bit.ly/c3GVZL which also connects to Euler, Catherine's mathematician – yes, I'm a mathematician too. Not too long ago, this aspect of the city led to Kaliningrad's appearance as a location for the BBC series "The Story of Maths."

Jim Stasheff
by email

To the Editors:

Regarding the Nov/Dec 2009 issue of Russian Life: I enjoyed the feature: "Winter Holidays" but I must offer some corrective feedback.

There is a glaring error in reference to the use of the word "Mass." Russian Orthodoxy does not know the word "Mass," which is a Latin expression. The writer of the article used the word on at least two occasions. I would have expected her to know that the proper expression is: "Divine Liturgy" instead of "Mass."

I also noticed that your proofreader missed the error in the middle of page 39: "On Christmas Eve (January 18) the priest cut a hole in the ice...." It should have read: "On Theophany Eve or On the Eve of the Feast of the Baptism of Christ..."

Sincerely,

Father Paul Pyrch
Virginia Beach, VA

by peter aleshkovsky

Moscow Calling

I WAS ON THE St. Petersburg-Moscow Express when I learned about the explosions in the Moscow Metro. We were an hour and a half out when suddenly my neighbor got a call on his cellphone. He asked loudly, "Papa, you at home? What happened?" He spoke for a long time in a whisper, then turned to me and said, "An hour ago there were two explosions in the Moscow Metro. Two. At different stations: Lubyanka and Park Kultury. They didn't give me any details, but there are casualties." After he spoke, he turned to stare out the window.

We were approaching Moscow at 200 km per hour. I had no doubts: Islamic terrorists. Not long ago, our military exterminated one of their charismatic leaders. They had taken their revenge on us.

The previous underground terrorist attack had been a long time ago, in 2004.

In 2002 there was the bloody Dubrovka siege, a tragedy that took 131 lives. It seems so long ago.

I hurriedly called Mama. On Mondays she works in the Historical Museum on Red Square. It's very close to Lubyanka, where one of the explosions took place. Thank God, she travels on a different metro line.

"You alive?" I stupidly asked.

"Alive, alive!" she pluckily replied. "I'm in the metro, can't hear you, call back later."

A much shorter version of this essay appeared in the New York Times on March 30, the day after the bombings.

At times life can be so absurd. She didn't know about the bombings yet, and answered as she always did, with a joke. I often ask her this foolish question; it's become something of a tradition.

A moment later, I got a text message from my daughter in Mumbai, where she's shooting a documentary.

"You alive there? Not by chance riding metro?"

"Alive, and you?" I type back.

"Need 400 dollars, want to stay longer, can u send?"

Next my son, the photojournalist, calls from Georgia.

"Papa, you alive?"

"Alive, alive!"

"Well, I've got a sore throat. I rented a Ford Explorer and am heading out today for Batumi."

All the other passengers in my cabin, it seemed, were asking the same question. They had all snuggled up to their cellphones. Soon it was impossible to call anywhere. Calls didn't go through; the network had collapsed.

The streets of the capital had also collapsed. Lines of militia had cordoned off the center. The Metro line, understandably, was closed. Only with great difficulty was I able to get a taxi.

Cars were trudging through the streets, or simply standing still. The taxi driver, having made me pay through the nose – twice the normal rate, swore at everyone: terrorists, the government, the militia. He leaned out his window, howling blood-curdling profanities at everyone who cut him off. Yet he himself drove perpendicular to traffic, not giving a damn about anyone. The radio announced 26 dead.

"Ther'll be more, they're all lying, but the *zverkov* ("beasts"– a rude name some use for Chechen terrorists, or which "native" Muscovites use for foreign guest workers) – I would hack them up into little pieces and make sure they suffered," said the taxi driver, oozing hatred.

I kept silent. I knew the casualties would go higher. I really wanted to whack the taxi driver on the back of the head, but I didn't, because I wanted to get home even more. I turned to stare out the window. Twenty-six people died.

No fright. No despair. Just emptiness and loathing. As if this filthy taxi driver had climbed into my bed with wet boots. Or stolen my favorite painting from my apartment wall.

At home I turned on the news. This is the tenth terrorist attack on the Metro since 1974. I turned off the TV and slumped into the couch.

"Nature, seeking a solution that would satisfy all, opted for death, which, as might be expected, satisfied no one," as one philosopher wrote.

I recalled my Mama's joking reply, "Alive-Alive!" and felt a bit better.

I thought about it and decided that tomorrow I would send $400 to my daughter in Mumbai.

Though I really don't feel like going outside.

AUTHOR: Peter Aleshkovsky is a novelist who lives and works in Moscow. His novel, *Fish: A History of One Migration*, was shortlisted for the Russian Booker Prize and will be published this fall by Russian Life Books, in a fine translation by Nina Murray.

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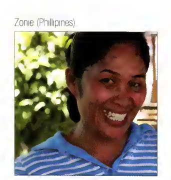
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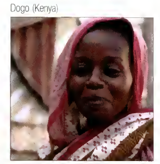
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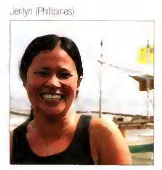
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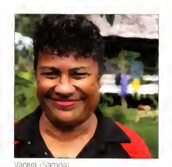
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